

The Impact of the Rise of Internet Celebrity Cities on Hainan's Cultural Tourism Industry

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Abstract: In recent years, numerous internet-famous cities have rapidly gained popularity on social media through their unique tourism appeal, attracting massive tourist flows and profoundly impacting local cultural tourism industries. This paper analyzes the reasons behind these cities' breakout success and explores their development models, offering insights for Hainan's cultural tourism sector. The study reveals that such urban phenomena primarily stem from four key factors: crafting distinctive city IPs, implementing innovative marketing strategies, providing premium travel experiences, and building community-driven city identities. Drawing from these lessons, Hainan's cultural tourism industry should leverage its unique cultural resources to develop tourism IPs, adopt new media-driven marketing approaches, enhance service quality, strengthen brand building, and promote high-quality development to boost the region's tourism visibility and competitiveness.

Keywords: Internet celebrity city; Hainan cultural tourism industry; Cultural tourism IP; Marketing promotion; Service experience

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and significance

With the widespread adoption of the internet and the evolution of social media, the tourism industry has undergone profound transformations. Internet-famous cities have emerged as new hotspots in the travel market. By leveraging unique cultural elements, culinary delights, and scenic attractions through new media platforms like short videos and live streaming, these cities have rapidly gained widespread recognition, attracting massive tourist traffic and maintaining rising popularity in the travel sector^[1-3]. For example, Zibo has become famous for its barbecue, and Harbin has become famous for its ice and snow tourism and "creative ways to pamper tourists." The success of these Internet-famous cities has not only boosted local tourism but also had a positive impact on urban economic development and image improvement^[4].

As an important tourist destination in China, Hainan has rich natural resources and a unique cultural heritage, which provides a good foundation for the development of the cultural tourism industry ^[5]. However, amid the increasingly fierce competition in the tourism market, Hainan's cultural tourism industry faces challenges such as product homogenization, outdated marketing approaches, and room for improvement in service quality. Studying the phenomenon of viral cities gaining popularity and their underlying logic holds significant practical value for Hainan's cultural tourism sector. By learning from successful models of internet-famous cities, Hainan can better leverage its unique strengths to develop distinctive cultural tourism brands, drive high-quality development of the industry, and support the construction of Hainan as an international tourism consumption hub ^[6].

1.2. Domestic and international research status

International research primarily focuses on the impact of destination marketing strategies, brand development, and social media on tourism. Scholars emphasize that destinations should attract visitors through distinctive brand positioning and effective marketing approaches, while social media plays a crucial role in disseminating travel information and influencing tourist decisions. Regarding service experiences, studies prioritize visitor satisfaction and loyalty, proposing that enhancing service quality remains key to boosting a destination's competitiveness ^[7,8].

Domestic research on internet-famous cities and cultural tourism industry development has been extensive. On one hand, in-depth analysis has been conducted on the formation mechanisms, development models, and impacts of internet-famous cities, highlighting that their breakout success stems from multiple factors, including unique urban resources, new media dissemination, government guidance, and market-driven initiatives. On the other hand, regarding cultural tourism industry development, studies have covered aspects such as cultural-tourism integration, innovation in tourism products, and marketing strategies. Regarding Hainan's cultural tourism sector, existing research primarily focuses on its resource advantages, current status, and challenges, proposing suggestions like enhancing cultural exploration and improving tourism service quality. However, studies leveraging the experience of internet-famous cities to promote Hainan's cultural tourism industry remain relatively scarce.

1.3. Research methods and innovations

This study employs a literature review methodology by examining domestic and international research on internet-famous cities and cultural tourism development, systematically organizing existing scholarship to establish theoretical foundations. Through case analysis, it selects representative internet-famous cities such as Zibo, Harbin, and Chongqing, conducting in-depth analyses of their viral success factors, development models, and best practices, with specific insights for Hainan's reference. Comparative analysis is applied to evaluate Hainan's current cultural tourism industry against these iconic cities, identifying gaps and shortcomings while proposing targeted development strategies.

This study's innovation lies in integrating the phenomenon of internet-famous cities breaking through their local boundaries with Hainan's cultural tourism industry development, offering a fresh perspective on exploring growth pathways. Through a comprehensive analysis of multiple internet-famous cities, we systematically summarize their success stories. Combining these insights with Hainan's specific conditions, we propose innovative and actionable recommendations to provide fresh approaches and methodologies for advancing Hainan's cultural tourism sector.

2. Analysis of the reasons for the rise of Internet celebrity cities

2.1. Unique city IP shaping

Internet-famous cities often have unique urban IP, which can be food, culture, landscape, and other characteristic elements ^[9,10]. Zibo barbecue has become the city's iconic culinary symbol, celebrated for its unique preparation method and distinctive flavor. This specialty features a signature combination of "small skewers, crispy pancakes, and scallions," paired with specially crafted dipping sauces to create a unique dining culture. The experience has drawn massive tourist crowds, making it a viral social media sensation that fuels Zibo's tourism boom. Harbin, meanwhile, crafts its city identity around ice and snow culture, with attractions like the Ice and Snow World and Sun Island Snow Expo gaining worldwide fame. Its grand-scale ice sculptures and exquisite designs showcase the artistry of winter landscapes, attracting countless visitors each year to witness spectacular ice displays and immerse themselves in the charm of ice culture. Chongqing, with its magical 8D terrain and mountainous landscape, has become a filming hotspot for numerous movies and TV series. Landmarks like Hongya Cave and the Liziba Light Rail Pier, renowned for their architectural uniqueness and transportation marvels, have gone viral online as must-visit spots, transforming Chongqing into a captivating internet-famous city.

2.2. Innovative marketing and promotion methods

New media platforms have played an important role in the breakout of Internet celebrity cities. Short video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou, as well as social media platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu, provide a broad space for the promotion of cities ^[11,12]. Internet-famous cities showcase their unique charm through posting exquisite images, engaging short videos, and vivid textual content on these platforms to attract user attention and sharing. Harbin has released numerous short videos on short video platforms featuring ice-snow landscapes, local delicacies, and folk culture. This content highlights the magical night views of the Ice and Snow World, the distinctive flavor of Madie'er ice pops, and captivating performances of Northeastern Errenzhuan (a traditional Chinese folk art), garnering massive likes, comments, and shares from netizens, which has steadily boosted Harbin's tourism popularity. These cities also actively invite influencers and travel bloggers to share their experiences through store visits and travel tips. With their massive fan bases and high influence, these influencers effectively attract followers' attention and spark travel desires. Zibo invited numerous food bloggers to taste its signature barbecue and share culinary experiences online, rapidly elevating the fame of Zibo barbecue and attracting a large number of tourists to visit.

2.3. Excellent tourism service experience

Internet-famous cities focus on improving the quality of tourism services to provide tourists with a high-quality tourism experience. In terms of tourism infrastructure, they continue to improve transportation, accommodation, catering, and other supporting facilities to facilitate tourists' travel and play ^[13]. During the peak season for ice and snow tourism, Harbin has increased public transport services and launched tourist shuttle routes to facilitate visitors' access to various attractions. Meanwhile, authorities have strengthened supervision of accommodation and catering industries to ensure tourists enjoy safe and comfortable lodging environments along with delicious and hygienic dining services. The city also focuses on personalized needs by offering customized travel services. For instance, some cities provide tailored tour itineraries designed according to travelers' interests and schedules, catering to individual preferences. Some scenic spots even offer unique guided tours featuring historical and cultural explanations or folk custom experiences, allowing visitors to gain deeper insights into local culture and

history^[14].

2.4. Building a city image with the participation of all

The rise of internet-famous cities stems from collective efforts in shaping their urban identity through public participation. Governments, businesses, and citizens collaborate to create welcoming tourism environments and services. Authorities actively guide and support the development of the tourism industry by formulating policies, increasing investments in infrastructure construction, and enhancing promotional campaigns to boost tourism^[15]. Meanwhile, the government has strengthened market supervision to maintain order and protect tourists' rights. Following the explosive popularity of Zibo barbecue, the municipal government swiftly introduced policies to regulate the market and enhance food safety oversight, ensuring visitors enjoy premium dining experiences. The city also organizes barbecue festivals and tourism events to boost its reputation. Enterprises actively develop distinctive tourism products and services to elevate travel quality. Accommodation providers like hotels, homestays, and restaurants continuously improve service standards, creating unique brands that offer comfortable and convenient stays. Citizens enthusiastically contribute to shaping the city's image through warm hospitality, showcasing the city's charm. In Harbin, residents spontaneously assist tourists by offering free rides, recommending attractions, and sharing local cuisine – demonstrating their hospitality and enhancing the city's image^[16].

3. Analysis of the current situation and problems of Hainan's cultural tourism industry development

3.1. Current situation of cultural tourism industry development in Hainan

Hainan boasts unparalleled natural resources, including sunshine, sandy beaches, azure seas, and clear skies, making it a renowned coastal tourism destination in China. Popular beaches like Yalong Bay and Haitang Bay in Sanya attract countless vacationers with their pristine sands and crystal-clear waters. The islands' abundant marine resources offer diverse water sports such as diving, surfing, and sea fishing, providing visitors with multifaceted experiences. Hainan's cultural tapestry is equally rich, blending Li and Miao ethnic traditions, maritime heritage, and the Dongpo cultural legacy. Unique Li craftsmanship, Miao Panhuang Festival celebrations, and other folk performances showcase distinctive ethnic charm. Maritime culture shines through fishing practices, maritime history, and oceanic beliefs—exemplified by the Mazu worship tradition in the South China Sea that reflects locals' deep connection with the sea. Dongpo culture, rooted in Su Shi's life and literary works in Hainan, is preserved at historical sites like Dongpo Academy and Guanlang Nunnery. In recent years, Hainan has boosted its tourism sector through policy reforms, investing heavily in infrastructure upgrades, product development, and promotional campaigns. The construction of the Hainan Island Ring Road now seamlessly connects the island's scenic spots. To facilitate tourists' travel and sightseeing, Hainan also holds various tourism and cultural activities, such as the Hainan International Tourism Island Carnival Festival and Sanya International Music Festival, to enhance the visibility and influence of Hainan^[17].

3.2. Problems existing in Hainan's cultural tourism industry

Some tourist attractions in Hainan suffer from product homogenization, lacking distinctive features and innovation. Beach destinations predominantly offer repetitive activities like beach walks and sea bathing, with few standout attractions. Tourism performances also face issues of repetitive content and monotonous formats, failing to meet

diverse visitor demands. The island's marketing strategies remain traditional, relying heavily on travel agencies and trade fairs while underutilizing new media platforms. In the social media era, Hainan's online promotion lacks sufficient effort to showcase its unique charm, resulting in relatively low online visibility and engagement. Service quality requires improvement, with overcrowding and delayed responses at peak seasons. The uneven professionalism among staff—particularly inadequate service awareness and professional competence among tour guides—impairs visitor experiences. Despite its rich cultural resources, Hainan's cultural exploration and utilization remain underdeveloped. Some cultural sites lack depth in presentation, failing to fully demonstrate the island's unique cultural appeal. The integration of culture and tourism remains insufficient, with cultural elements not being adequately incorporated into tourism offerings. In terms of products and services, the cultural added value of tourism products is low ^[18].

4. The impact of Internet celebrity cities on Hainan's cultural tourism industry

4.1. Digging into characteristic cultural resources and building cultural tourism IP

Hainan should fully leverage its rich cultural resources to develop distinctive cultural tourism IPs. As a hallmark of Hainan's identity, Li and Miao cultures could form the foundation for creating immersive attractions like cultural theme parks and traditional villages. These destinations would showcase authentic Li architecture, ethnic handicrafts, and folk performances, allowing visitors to experience the unique charm of these heritage traditions firsthand. Developing culturally-themed products such as Li brocade garments and Miao silver ornaments would significantly enhance the value of tourism offerings. The province's historical legacy, including iconic sites like Dongpo Academy and Hai Rui's Former Residence, provides an unparalleled backdrop for preserving and promoting this cultural heritage ^[19]. We can develop historical and cultural tourism routes by leveraging these heritage sites, delving into their profound historical significance. Through cultural lectures, themed exhibitions, and related activities, visitors can gain insights into Hainan's historical evolution and cultural legacy. As a vital component of Hainan's cultural identity, marine culture offers opportunities to create specialized tourism projects like ocean-themed museums and parks. Ocean museums showcase biological specimens and maritime artifacts, allowing visitors to appreciate the rich tapestry of marine culture. Marine theme parks can host educational programs and adventure activities, providing immersive experiences that highlight the ocean's cultural essence.

4.2. Using new media platforms to innovate marketing methods

Hainan should actively use short video platforms, social media platforms, and other new media for tourism promotion ^[20]. On short video platforms such as TikTok and Kuaishou, well-produced Hainan tourism videos showcasing the island's natural landscapes, culinary culture, and folk customs are created. Through creative filming techniques and engaging content, these videos attract user attention and sharing, thereby boosting the online popularity of Hainan tourism. On social media platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu, travel guides, recommended attractions, and food information about Hainan tourism are published to interact with users, answer their questions, and enhance their understanding and interest in Hainan tourism. Influencers such as travel bloggers and internet celebrities are invited to experience and promote Hainan tourism. They showcase the island's scenic beauty, culinary delights, and unique travel experiences through short videos, travel diaries, and live streams to attract followers to visit Hainan. Collaborating with renowned travel bloggers to launch "Traveling with Bloggers in Hainan" campaigns, these influencers recommend Hainan's featured travel routes and attractions based on their

own experiences, stimulating followers' travel desires.

4.3. Improving the quality of tourism services and optimizing the tourist experience

Hainan should enhance tourism infrastructure development by improving transportation, accommodation, and catering facilities. Regarding transportation, the island needs to optimize its network by increasing public transport frequency and routes to boost convenience. During peak seasons, implementing measures like advance ticket booking and time-slot entry systems will help manage visitor congestion effectively. For lodging, stricter management of hotels and homestays is required to elevate service quality and meet diverse tourist needs. In the catering sector, strengthened food safety oversight should be paired with promoting Hainan's local specialties to enrich dining experiences. The province should also prioritize staff training to improve service professionalism, including regular coaching for tour guides to enhance their interpretive skills and delivery techniques. Professional ethics education for tourism personnel is crucial to cultivating a positive service image and delivering warm hospitality. Timely feedback collection through surveys and online reviews will help identify service gaps, enabling prompt improvements to boost tourist satisfaction. By gathering visitor opinions via questionnaires and digital platforms, Hainan can continuously refine its tourism services. The needs and feedback of customers are constantly optimized to improve tourism products and services and enhance tourists' travel experience.

4.4. Strengthening the construction of the urban brand and creating a good tourism atmosphere

Hainan should establish a clear urban brand positioning that highlights its unique characteristics and advantages to create an internationally influential tourism destination. The province could position itself as an "International Tropical Island Tourism Destination," emphasizing its tropical landscapes, maritime culture, and distinctive travel experiences to attract domestic and international visitors. To support this positioning, unified brand slogans and visual identity systems should be developed, with multi-channel promotional campaigns to enhance the brand's visibility and reputation. Hainan should intensify city branding efforts to boost its global tourism market presence. By participating in international tourism exhibitions, showcasing local resources and products to draw attention from global travel companies and tourists, and collaborating with renowned media outlets for coverage, the province can significantly increase its exposure in international markets. Domestically, organizing cultural tourism events and attending national exhibitions will help attract more domestic travelers. Additionally, urban environmental improvements are crucial to foster a welcoming tourism atmosphere. This includes enhancing green spaces, improving ecological conditions, and elevating the city's overall image. Furthermore, stricter management of tourist attraction areas is essential to maintain pristine surroundings. Cleanliness and beauty. We advocate civilized tourism, improve the civilized quality of citizens, create a warm and friendly tourism atmosphere, so that tourists can feel the warmth of home in Hainan.

5. Countermeasures and suggestions for the development of Hainan's cultural tourism industry

5.1. Strengthening the integration of culture and tourism, enriching the supply of tourism products

Hainan should further strengthen the integration of culture and tourism by deeply exploring cultural resources and developing culturally rich tourism products. In scenic area development, cultural elements should be incorporated

to create theme-based attractions. For instance, at Nanshan Cultural Tourism Zone, Buddhist cultural elements should be thoroughly explored to develop immersive experiences where visitors can appreciate natural landscapes while immersing themselves in profound Buddhist philosophy. When designing travel routes, emphasis should be placed on connecting cultural elements through themed itineraries. The “Hainan Historical Culture Tour” exemplifies this approach, linking cultural landmarks like Dongpo Academy, Hai Rui’s Former Residence, and Yazhou Ancient City to help travelers understand Hainan’s historical legacy. Hainan should continuously innovate tourism products to meet diverse visitor needs. Rural tourism should leverage local characteristics to create idyllic landscapes, folk culture experiences, and agricultural activities that let visitors enjoy rural life. Wellness tourism should capitalize on Hainan’s climate advantages and natural resources to offer hot spring therapy, forest wellness programs, and traditional Chinese medicine treatments. Educational tours should utilize Hainan’s natural and cultural resources to develop marine science education, Li and Miao ethnic culture programs, and tropical plant exploration projects for students to provide opportunities for extracurricular learning and practice.

5.2. Strengthening policy support to promote the development of the cultural and tourism industry

The government should enhance policy support for the cultural tourism industry by introducing preferential policies to encourage corporate investment. Regarding land use, priority should be given to meeting the land requirements for cultural tourism projects, ensuring adequate land allocation for their development. Tax incentives should be implemented to reduce operational burdens on enterprises and promote business growth. A dedicated development fund should be established to support project construction, tourism infrastructure upgrades, and promotional campaigns. Financial incentives such as subsidies and loan interest rate discounts should be provided to incentivize corporate investment. The government must strengthen strategic planning by formulating scientific development plans that outline clear priorities for the industry. Enhanced approval processes and rigorous supervision will ensure project quality and effectiveness. Enterprises should be guided to develop tourism resources rationally, avoiding reckless or excessive exploitation to achieve sustainable growth in the cultural tourism sector.

5.3. Cultivating professional talents and enhancing industrial competitiveness

Hainan should strengthen collaboration with universities and research institutions to establish cultural tourism talent training bases, offering specialized programs and courses to cultivate professionals with industry-specific expertise. Through industry-academia-research partnerships, students will gain hands-on experience and enhanced practical innovation capabilities. Enterprises are encouraged to partner with academic institutions for customized training programs that align with corporate needs, ensuring targeted and practical talent development. The province should implement preferential policies to attract top-tier cultural tourism professionals from home and abroad. By providing competitive work environments and attractive compensation packages, Hainan can recruit management experts, tourism planners, marketing specialists, and other professionals. A performance-based incentive system should be established to reward outstanding contributors to the cultural tourism sector, thereby stimulating creativity and motivation among talents.

6. Conclusion

The breakout success of internet-famous cities in Hainan has provided valuable insights for the development of

its cultural tourism industry. Analysis reveals that three key factors drive their popularity: crafting unique city IPs, implementing innovative marketing strategies, and delivering premium tourism experiences through community engagement. Drawing from these models, Hainan's cultural tourism sector should: (1) Tap into its distinctive cultural resources to create compelling tourism IPs; (2) Leverage new media platforms to innovate marketing approaches; (3) Continuously improve service quality and visitor experiences. Simultaneously, enhancing brand building and fostering a tourism-friendly environment will boost industry growth. Furthermore, measures like integrating cultural and tourism resources, increasing policy support, and cultivating professional talent will diversify offerings and drive high-quality development in the sector.

As China's only tropical island province, Hainan boasts irreplaceable natural resources and a rich cultural heritage, positioning it as a prime candidate for becoming a "long-lasting" cultural tourism destination. While the viral buzz of internet-famous cities marks the beginning, sustaining visitor retention is the key to long-term success. The Hainan tourism industry should not chase fleeting online popularity but instead transform the breakout success of these cities into sustainable growth momentum. Through continuous product innovation, service upgrades, and cultural exploration, we can turn temporary traffic into a lasting reputation, shifting from superficial check-in tourism to immersive cultural experiences.

In the future, with the continuous advancement of Hainan's construction as an international tourism and consumption hub and the deepening integration of culture and tourism, Hainan is expected to break through current development bottlenecks and create a cultural tourism brand with international influence. By absorbing the successful experiences of internet-famous cities and exploring differentiated development paths based on its own characteristics, Hainan will not only become a favored tourist destination for domestic visitors but also secure a place in the international tourism market. This will showcase the unique charm of China's tropical islands to the world, tell the story of Hainan's cultural tourism well, and contribute "Hainan Power" to the development of China's cultural tourism industry.

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