

Leveraging Zibo Barbecue's Success to Develop Hebei's Culinary Brand: A Strategic Path

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Abstract: In 2023, Zibo barbecue culture exploded across the entire country, allowing people nationwide to experience and enjoy Zibo barbecue. This phenomenon injected new vitality into the economic development of Zibo. To promote the economic development of Hebei Province, this paper fully analyzes the reasons behind the popularity of Zibo barbecue, combines these insights with the characteristics of traditional cuisine in Hebei, and draws lessons from Zibo barbecue's success as a business card for Zibo. The paper then outlines a strategy for building a culinary business card for Hebei.

Keywords: Zibo barbecue; Hebei traditional food; Online platform; City business card; Government-enterprise cooperation

Online publication: July 10, 2024

1. Introduction

Shandong Zibo is located in the middle of Shandong Province and comprises the districts of Zhangdian, Zichuan, Boshan, Zhoucun, and Linzi. In 2023, Zibo barbecue became a nationwide sensation on the internet, thanks to its distinctive “small cake, oven, and dip” barbecue trio. This led to the phrase “Catch a Taste of Zibo” becoming a trendy phenomenon. According to “Tourism China” data, during the 2023 “May Day” period, Zibo saw an 800% increase in accommodation bookings compared to the same period in 2019, and tourism orders surged by over 2000%. High-speed rail tickets from Beijing South to Zibo sold out in one minute on the first day of the “May Day” holiday, catapulting Zibo to the top of the national popular scenic spots list. In March, Zibo's fiscal revenue growth ranked third in Shandong Province, climbing seven places from the previous month. These facts highlight the significant economic benefits Zibo barbecue has brought to the city.

Hebei Province, the only province in China with all landforms and ecological systems – plain, plateau, grassland, forest, mountain, hill, lake, desert, and seashore – is an important birthplace of Chinese civilization. Its rich and unique culture, formed over thousands of years, makes it a veritable treasure trove of cultural and tourism resources. As a crucial part of Chinese food culture, Hebei's culinary heritage boasts a unique charm, thanks to its profound historical background and distinct regional characteristics. This paper focuses on how to leverage Hebei's distinctive food to aid the province's economic development, capitalize on the internet's

advantages, and establish a prominent brand for Hebei Province.

2. Analysis of the reasons for the rapid popularity of Zibo barbecue nationwide

Jia analyzed the characteristics of the “Zibo barbecue” phenomenon in shaping and disseminating the city’s image, providing insights ^[1]. Guo summarized the reasons for the popularity of Zibo barbecue and the experience of shaping Zibo’s city image ^[2]. From a government perspective, Zhang and Li adopted case studies and cross-study methods to explore the reasons behind the popular Zibo barbecue ^[3]. Using text analysis as a research method, Wu detailed the reasons and the entire process of the “Zibo tourism boom” on the Internet ^[4]. Taking the popular Douyin platform in Zibo, Shandong Province as an example, Zhang conducted “word frequency statistics” and “theme induction” analysis on popular short video titles, improving Zibo’s visibility ^[5]. Zong pointed out that short videos enhance information production with richer media symbols, and the emotions of social media participants impact the communication effect ^[6]. Wang analyzed the timing, scope of influence of “Zibo Barbecue,” and its impact on Zibo’s tourism network attention ^[7]. Wang and Zhang explored the characteristics of tourist behavior and experience in Zibo using text analysis ^[8]. Chen analyzed the internal effect of the “Zibo Barbecue” practice example in promoting the innovative characteristics of Chinese modernization, innovation implications, and inspiration ^[9]. Zhang examined the law and characteristics of new media communication through the Zibo barbecue phenomenon, combined with practical experience ^[10]. Huang *et al.* took Zibo Barbecue as an example to explore the impact of short videos on city brands ^[11].

The relevant introduction and research of Hebei traditional food. Han used the city card of Cangzhou as an example to suggest ways to promote the rational development of urban economic and industrial structures ^[12]. Wang used Hebei Satellite TV’s Jiwei as an example to show how food documentaries can create higher cultural value by expressing homesickness, telling common people’s stories, showing family and national feelings, and realizing industrial upgrades ^[13]. Zhang *et al.* believed that in the era of new media, the dissemination of Hebei food culture can comprehensively and multi-angledly show both the material and spiritual connotations of Hebei food culture and its individual content ^[14]. Ren investigated the characteristic economy of food and tourism in Chongli, Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province, which rely on ice and snow sports, and improved the living standards of Chongli people ^[15].

In today’s increasingly homogenized cities, urban travel attractions are less impressive. Food, as a frequent scene in travel, has gradually become a beautiful business card for a city. Hebei, as a representative province of North China, boasts a rich and colorful food culture. From ancient times to the present day, this land has nurtured countless mouth-watering delicacies. Typical snacks and famous dishes include Hejian donkey meat fire, Hebei Gezha, Tangshan Chizi Shaoxing cake, Shijiazhuang golden hairy lionfish, Tangshan Jingdong stewed elbow, cumin roast meat, hand-held cake, sugar ears, stir-fried gluten, Shenze pick-cake, Pingquan sheep soup, pot oven Shaoxing cake, etc. These snacks are all local favorites. Although Hebei has many representative delicacies and snacks, there is a lack of iconic foods synonymous with the province. Therefore, it is urgent to learn from the valuable experience of Zibo barbecue and explore how to create a culinary brand for Hebei.

First, leveraging Yanzhao Hebei’s red culture to create a red city business card. Red cultural resources are the material carriers of continuous red genes and fresh teaching materials for red education. Hebei Province, with Xibaipo as the revolutionary holy land, includes places like Leting County Li Dazhao Memorial Hall, Eighth Route Army 12th and 9th Division Memorial Hall, Huailai County Dong Cunrui Martyrs Memorial Hall, Ran Zhuang Tunnel War Memorial Hall, Bethune Kotnis Memorial Hall, Ma Benzhai Memorial Hall, and other red cultural sites. These places can tell stories of faith and culture through their historical relics. Combined with local cuisine characteristics, they can be built into the business card of a red tourism city.

In recent years, cities like Chongqing, Xi'an, Changsha, Xuchang, and now Zibo have become Internet-famous tourism cities, iterating constantly. Unique and unrepeatably urban elements have successfully ignited netizens' enthusiasm and attention. Hebei province should combine the red education needs of young cadres in colleges and institutions inside and outside the province, attract red education operation teams, and launch a series of national tourism services. Additionally, the "immersive experience" covers almost all areas of emerging cultural tourism consumption and is becoming the "next outlet" of the cultural tourism industry. It is essential to accurately grasp the pulse of the times, promote the integration of history and reality, and build the revolutionary base areas in the Hebei-Lu-Henan border area into immersive cultural tourism projects. Enhancing tourists' participation, providing era-themed food and beverages, and recommending age-appropriate, healthy food like pick-pocketed cakes, pot oven pancakes, and fried cakes can create an immersive, multi-format entertainment and leisure space for young people and establish a "red" immersive commercial complex.

Second, utilizing Hebei's famous intangible cultural heritage. For example, the national intangible cultural heritage Jingxing La Hua is a unique folk art form from Jingxing, originating from festivals, temple fairs, celebrations, and street flower fairs. With its deep and simple charm, strong artistic characteristics, and expressive dance posture, Jingxing La Hua is beloved by many, from the elderly to children. Another national intangible cultural heritage, Taolin Ping Huface She Huo, is a key folk performance during the Spring Festival in Jingxing County, with a history of over 600 years. Often based on historical stories like Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Outlaws of the Marsh, these performances are significant Spring Festival ceremonies.

Combining local food characteristics, rural Hebei celebrates with feasts during significant events. In Zhengding, the custom of "eight dishes and eight bowls" continues today, with the provincial intangible cultural heritage Song Ji Eight Bowls elevating this tradition. During the Spring Festival, families prepare feasts, and the traditional Zhengding eight bowls include a variety of dishes, from meats to vegetables. Jiaozi cooked in Zan Huangcai pot is another unique local delicacy, with dumplings braised in a large iron pot, borrowing flavors from each other. These traditional dishes served during significant festivals or family reunions can be promoted to tourists, allowing them to experience Hebei's cultural atmosphere and food.

Finally, leveraging Hebei's characteristic sports, like the popular ice and snow projects. Relying on the Winter Olympics brand and Beijing-Zhang sports and cultural tourism, Chongli continues to innovate ice and snow economic consumption scenes, creating a "sports + culture + consumption" chain. The local economy benefits from this high-quality development. Special agricultural products from Chongli and other Zhangjiakou counties, like golden lotus tea, Chongli broad beans, Chongli mushrooms, Huailai wine, and Huai'an bacon, are popular. Local restaurants serve special dishes like Chongli fried cake, oat noodles, and lamb scorpion hot pot.

To effectively communicate these offerings, use the internet and social media to form a communication matrix. First, leverage college students as a "massive" group. Students from various provinces in Hebei's universities have spending power and interest in intangible cultural heritage and ice and snow sports, quickly forming trends. Second, recruit "online celebrities" with large followings and effective publicity. Third, involve leading cadres, who often generate interest when appearing in new media. Additionally, the government should guide and supervise market practices, implementing measures to regulate prices and ensure a sound market environment.

3. Conclusion

In summary, by leveraging Hebei's red culture, intangible cultural heritage, and characteristic sports, and using mainstream new media as carriers, it is possible to release product lines and video content, tell Hebei's city

stories, create topic heat, and form a multi-level, multi-angle publicity effect. This approach will polish Hebei's brand, increase policy support, improve public opinion supervision, and enhance the city's influence, ultimately creating a distinguished culinary business card for Hebei.

Funding

Foundation Project: Social Science Development Research Project of Hebei Province in 2023 (Project No. 20230203011)

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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