

Analysis of the Factors Contributing to the Nationwide Spread of Zibo Barbecue

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Abstract: Zibo is a city with a long history and rich culture. Its unique geographical location and cultural environment have created favorable conditions for its development. In 2023, the barbecue culture in Zibo became popular nationwide. The reason for this situation is not only due to the special geographical location and traditional culture of Zibo but also due to many human factors that contributed to this prosperity, allowing Zibo's economy to take off in 2023. This article will explore the reasons why Zibo barbecue is so popular from several aspects, such as the unique barbecue culture in Zibo, the cooperation and promotion between the government and enterprises, the kindness and hospitality with Shandong people, and the promotion by the media and the internet.

Keywords: Zibo barbecue; Rushing to Zibo for barbecue; Online platform; City icon; Government enterprise cooperation

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of March 2023, the video of a group of college students taking the high-speed rail to savor the skewers in Zibo, Shandong, has become popular all over the internet. The Zibo barbecue has only taken two months to spread across the country, becoming a dazzling icon of Zibo, a traditional industrial city, and attracting fans from all over the country. Zibo barbecue has rapidly risen nationwide and become a leader in the barbecue industry. From local snacks to nationally renowned food brands, the success of Zibo barbecue is supported by many factors, which are worth analyzing carefully.

From the perspective of regional economics, Zhang and Mao analyzed in depth the impact of the popularity of Zibo barbecue on the regional economy, based on the development process and characteristics of the Zibo barbecue incident ^[1]. Xu analyzed "Zibo Barbecue" as the main case and explored the reasons for its success in the "attention economy" environment ^[2]. Cai and others used the big data content analysis method to select user comments on the TikTok platform with the topic of "Zibo barbecue" as the data source and analyzed the comments related to Zibo tourism public services ^[3]. Jia analyzed the characteristics of the "Zibo Barbecue" phenomenon in empowering the shaping and dissemination of urban image and proposed inspirations from several aspects such as playing a good "difference chess," playing a good "fusion card," and playing a good

“synergy song.”^[4] Zhao and Chen compared the “out of circle” cases of Zibo and Harbin, and analyzed the similarities and differences in their urban image construction process^[5]. Guo summarized the reasons why Zibo barbecue became popular and the experience of shaping the urban image of Zibo City to provide new ideas for shaping the urban image of other cities^[6]. From the perspective of the government, Zhang and Li used case studies and cross-disciplinary research methods to study the reasons behind the popularity of Zibo barbecue^[7]. Zhang took the popular TikTok platform in Zibo, Shandong Province, as an example, and carried out “word frequency statistics” and “theme induction” analysis of popular short video title texts, improving the visibility of Zibo city^[8]. Zong pointed out that short videos use richer media symbols to assist information production, and related triggering events have more special and complex diffusion paths^[9]. Wang collected data related to online attention and analyzed the network impact lifecycle, regional scope, and impact on the attention of the Zibo tourism network of “Zibo Barbecue.”^[10] Wu took the “Zibo tourism craze” as a typical case, combed in detail the reasons and the whole process of Zibo Internet’s emergence, and analyzed the user’s acceptance of short videos of city publicity based on the Stimulus-Influence-Process-Satisfaction (SIPS) model^[11]. Wang and Zhang used text analysis methods based on Baidu Index and User-Generated-Content (UGC) text corpus to explore the behavioral and experiential characteristics of tourists in Zibo^[12]. Zhang analyzed the laws and characteristics of new media dissemination through the Zibo barbecue phenomenon and practical experience^[13]. Huang *et al.* used Zibo barbecue as an example to explore the impact of short videos on urban brands^[14]. Chen analyzed the innovative characteristics, innovative implications, and innovative enlightenment of the “Zibo Barbecue” practice example to promote the Chinese path to modernization^[15]. Based on the above research, this article deeply analyzes the reasons why Zibo barbecue is popular throughout the country, aiming to reveal the secret to its success.

2. Unique barbecue culture

Firstly, barbecue is a dietary method that caters to the tastes and needs of modern people, and its taste and atmosphere attract many people. Especially with the accelerated pace of modern life, barbecue, as a convenient and fast way of eating, can meet people’s appetite and social needs. When it comes to barbecue in China, the first thing people think of is not Zibo barbecue, but Northeast barbecue. Northeast barbecue runs through the north and south with its unique flavor, and Zibo barbecue has taken a differentiated route. Unlike Northeast barbecue, Zibo barbecue has a unique soul-eating method of “small skewers + flatbread + scallions.” The small “Maza” table in the outdoor booth has become the most popular and accessible gathering spot for skewer enthusiasts. Barbecue is still the same, but when combined with the unique Shandong flavor of scallions and flatbread, the characteristics of Zibo barbecue have already made itself distinctive. Combined with the unique ritual of “one table, one furnace, one roll of flatbread,” Zibo barbecue gives people a strong visual impact.

One of the core secrets of Zibo barbecue is the small stove. Authentic Zibo barbecue requires a small stove at each table, and the meat skewers served are already half-cooked, with the cooking controlled by the diners themselves. From chicken, duck, fish, and sheep to vegetables and mushrooms, all can be grilled.

The second secret technique of Zibo barbecue is a three-piece set: flatbread, scallions, and sauce. Take two strings of sizzling and oily meat skewers, wrap them with dipping sauce first, and then spread them on the flatbread. Hold the flatbread tightly with your palm, pull the skewer and a few pieces of meat are completely wrapped. Then add a few pieces of scallion leaves or white part of a scallion, and this roll becomes a small meat wrap. Enjoy the wheat aroma of the flatbread with each bite, complemented by the dipping sauce’s blend of peanuts, sesame seeds, and freshly roasted meat. The flatbread balances the slightly salty meat, while the dipping sauce enhances the flavor, and the scallions cut through the greasiness, creating a harmonious taste

experience.

The third secret technique of Zibo barbecue is Qingdao beer, and it is well-known that beer is the perfect partner for barbecue. When Zibo barbecue meets Qingdao beer, Shandong's two major brands come together and create a spark. The aroma of malt blends with the scent of grilled meat, creating a refreshing and vibrant atmosphere. A bottle of beer and a skewer of meat come together on the charming nights of Zibo. It is clear that Qingdao beer and Zibo barbecue are a perfect match, allowing visitors to experience both the beer and the delicious "Zizi" flavor, making them "come with enthusiasm and return satisfied."

3. Collaboration and promotion between government and enterprises

The government of Zibo allows large-scale barbecue to exist in the urban area, which is a bold and proactive policy that breaks the restrictions and prohibitions of barbecue stalls in some cities in the past. Compared to some cities with strong cultural power, Zibo seeks development through its efforts, and formulating such policies and encouraging its barbecue development is one of its reasonable ways. The Zibo Municipal Government attaches great importance to the development of the barbecue industry and has formulated a series of support policies, providing a good developing environment for barbecue enterprises. Simultaneously, barbecue companies are actively cooperating with the government to jointly promote the Zibo barbecue brand. Through online and offline promotion, holding barbecue cultural festivals, and other activities, the popularity and reputation of Zibo barbecue have been greatly improved.

The Zibo government has set up a "Barbecue Industry One Thing" service window specifically for practitioners to apply for relevant procedures for the barbecue business. Each district or county administrative approval service bureau has set up a special window for "barbecue one thing," opened a "green channel," and focused on the production and operation content of the barbecue industry, such as catering services, flatbread production, and liquor production, to achieve "one set of materials, one form application, one window processing, and unified certification," and promote the "one thing, one processing" of the barbecue industry.

For the convenience of travel, the Zibo Municipal Government has specially opened a barbecue train from Jinan to Zibo, which operates daily during the May Day holiday. Multiple bus routes have been opened in Zibo to directly reach stalls, covering tourist-concentrated areas such as train stations and major universities. Zibo Station, combined with passenger transportation big data, promptly opened manual ticket windows and dynamically adjusted the number of entry ticket inspection channels. Regarding taxi drivers, the government has issued a document stipulating that they are not allowed to refuse transportation or overcharge during the barbecue period. If discovered, their business qualifications will be immediately revoked. Traffic police and urban management have foregone their vacation to manage traffic on the front line to support barbecue vendors. Throughout the area, young volunteers can be seen everywhere providing guidance, assistance, and other services to travelers.

For the convenience of accommodation, Zibo has issued a notice to implement price increase control measures for hotel rooms throughout the city. If the price rises by more than 50%, it will be investigated and punished according to the behavior of price manipulation. To regulate consumption, Zibo has issued a warning letter to regulate the pricing behavior of business operators, requiring them to prominently display the prices of goods and services on their business premises, and not to use deceptive and misleading language, text, or other false or ambiguous pricing methods. They are not allowed to use false discounts, misleading labeling, or other methods to induce consumers to engage in transactions, and are not allowed to charge fees higher than the listed price or fees not indicated outside the listed price. The various measures taken by Zibo have created

an extremely considerate and thoughtful consumption environment, highlighting the city's humanistic care and reflecting its unique charm.

To provide a good tourism experience for tourists from other places in Zibo, the government has issued an initiative to local citizens, suggesting that priority should be given to tourists from other places to taste Zibo barbecue, and to avoid dining during peak hours as much as possible, to prevent tourists from queuing up for too long and improve service quality. Some city residents even voluntarily drive tourists from other places to Zibo to eat barbecue. Tourists from other places who drive to Zibo to taste barbecue will be warned and not fined for any violations caused by their cars. The people of Zibo are also under great pressure, afraid of leaving a bad impression on tourists. Some people pick up garbage along the road after work, while others dare not honk their horns when they see cars with license plates from other places. The government's high service awareness and standards are reflected everywhere. All these efforts are made to provide tourists with a homely experience.

4. The kindness and hospitality of the Shandong people

The reason Zibo barbecue is trending is its popularity across the city's streets and alleys, north and south of the Yangtze River. The rising smoke and fire behind it tell a touching story that warms college students. On May 1, 2022, a student at Shandong University's central campus tested positive for nucleic acid test. Teachers and students were relocated to quarantine hotels and makeshift hospitals in four surrounding cities, including Jinan, Zibo, Tai'an, and Dezhou.

Many teachers and students sent to Zibo were accommodated in Linzi. The local government of Linzi extended a caring hand, providing as much support as possible. When the quarantine ended and students were about to leave Linzi, the government rented a barbecue restaurant citywide, inviting students to enjoy a barbecue and experience it firsthand. They also extended a heartfelt invitation to return to Zibo during the warm spring season.

With nostalgia, students returned to Linzi and Zibo with classmates and friends, believing that "sincerity begets sincerity." Perhaps the people and government of Zibo did not anticipate that their kindness would lead to the later popularity of Zibo barbecue. Nonetheless, the Zibo government did not disappoint the students and ensured high-quality service, mobilizing efforts from top to bottom for the occasion.

5. Media and network promotion

The rise of social media has significantly boosted the popularity of Zibo barbecue. Its appearance on the hot search is not accidental but inevitable. Behind Zibo barbecue is a touching story featuring a student from Shandong University. College students skillfully use various social network platforms from the Internet, such as TikTok, Kwai, etc. Educated in traditional Chinese culture and valuing gratitude, these students actively share stories of traditional virtues on various platforms, generating widespread resonance. This has led many students to Zibo, Shandong, to experience Zibo barbecue. The process of these visits, captured by students on their phones, has further amplified the appeal of Zibo barbecue and the city's hospitality.

Zibo, with a population of 4.7 million, received 5 million people in March 2023. According to data from Meituan, as of April 10, 2023, the accommodation booking volume for Zibo on the May Day holiday has increased by 800% compared to 2019, ranking first in Shandong in terms of growth rate. The impactful visual of Zibo barbecue and the spectacular scene of people queuing up have also attracted various media outlets to report. Through sharing and recommendations on various social media platforms, the delicious and unique

aspects of Zibo barbecue have reached a wider audience. The Zibo government maintains a keen awareness and control over online platforms, fostering continuous interaction between the Zibo Municipal Government, online bloggers, citizens, and tourists.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the main factors contributing to the popularity of Zibo barbecue throughout the country include its unique barbecue culture, cooperation, and promotion between the government and enterprises, kindness and hospitality of the Shandong people, media and internet promotion, as well as the help of social media dissemination. These factors together constitute the key factors for the success of Zibo barbecue and also provide strong support and examples for its popularity nationwide. In the future, with the continuous development and innovation of the Zibo barbecue industry, it will continue to demonstrate its unique charm and competitiveness nationwide and even globally.

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