

The Marketing Strategy Behind Internet Celebrity Cities

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ABSTRACT

The booming development of the Internet and social media has made marketing essential to urban management and image building. In recent years, with the constant innovation of technology, urban marketing has coruscated a new vitality and formed a new concept — Internet Celebrity city. These cities often stand out with their unique publicity, and combined with their long history, culture, and breathtaking natural scenery, they have become the focus of attention on Internet platforms. Behind the Internet celebrity city is the unique image the government and enterprises created through creativity, technology and characteristic culture. This research aims to understand the marketing strategies used by Chinese Internet celebrity cities and to study the future road and innovative development of Chinese urban construction. It analyzes Internet celebrity cities' policies and publicity programs through case studies. Chinese Internet celebrity cities have realized the establishment and publicity of the city image with brand positioning, consumption transformation and social media cooperation, helping the city to attract more passenger flow and investment. The results confirm that building an Internet celebrity city is an effective means of city marketing.

KEYWORDS

Internet celebrity; Creative marketing; Trend; Brand; Social media

1. INTRODUCTION

With the popularity of short-video media such as Douyin and Kuaishou, people can learn more about the appearance and development of cities through the Internet, such as Chongqing and Xi'an. These cities, which have come into the public's view under the Internet, are known as Internet Celebrity Cities. Internet celebrity cities represent the effect of city marketing in the new era. They are based on interactive marketing on the Internet, which is popular on social media and has a lot of attention and fans. In the era of underdeveloped Internet, due to the need for more resources, information and transportation, it took much work for second and third-tier cities to establish brand awareness and create unique styles, which made it difficult for these cities to explore their brands. However, the Internet and new media development have rapidly disseminated city marketing. The cost of dissemination is also decreasing, allowing city marketing to sink into the second-, third- and even fourth-tier cities.

In recent years, the rise of Internet celebrity cities is closely related to the development and popularization of the Internet. Social media provides a platform for many cities to show their unique charm and cultural characteristics and a channel for tourists to share their travel tips and experiences. Some characteristic cultural cities and towns have attracted more foreign tourists to visit them through the publicity and exquisite marketing of online platforms, thus facilitating the development of local tourism and cultural industries. Their culture, history or cityscape usually characterize them. They

are good at clever marketing through social platforms, coupled with their well-developed tourism infrastructure and service industries, which have attracted the attention of the media and the public.

The hype of Internet celebrity cities is fundamentally connected to the cities' online presence, audience groups, and widely shared visual content, positively influencing the city's attractiveness and influence.

The study focuses on specific Internet celebrity city cases, such as Xi'an and Zibo, and analyses their journeys toward becoming famous. The study aims to identify the key factors and mechanisms contributing to their successful transformations by investigating these cases.

The creation of an Internet celebrity city is, in essence, a strategic endeavour to elevate a city's image, uncover its unique brand culture, and harness the power of new media and the Internet to amplify its brand message. By doing so, cities can align their brand value and allure with contemporary societal trends while invigorating their economic growth. Engaging in research on the marketing strategies of Internet celebrity cities offers a valuable lens through which to understand local culture, the city's spiritual core, and the guiding principles of its urban leaders.

2. INTERPRETATION: THE STATUS QUO OF CHINESE INTERNET CELEBRITY CITIES

According to the China Internet Celebrity City Index Report (2022), the overall development of Chinese Internet Celebrity Cities has shown an increase in cities, a balanced spatial layout, and prominent regional characteristics. The number of Internet celebrity cities has increased compared with the number before 2022, and their distribution in the east and west of China tends to be balanced. Once unheard-of, cities capture the public's attention with their unique cultural allure and natural splendour. Take Kangbashi District in Ordos City, Inner Mongolia, for example. This city has skillfully blended its traditional regional culture with innovative promotional strategies, including inviting renowned singers to perform, utilizing live-streaming platforms, and organizing captivating online events to attract the interest and admiration of a vast audience. The eastern, central and western Internet celebrity cities in China each show different regional characteristics, of which the Internet celebrity cities in the east region and counties (Such as Hangzhou, Guangzhou and Shanghai) have an advantage in urban consumption attraction, number of tourists, and economic strength; the cities in the central region and counties (Such as Wuhan, Zhengzhou and Changsha) show a balanced development in urban characteristics, tourism resources and economic strength. Cities in the western region and counties (Such as Xi'an, Chengdu and Chongqing) have unique cultural attractions and tourism resources.

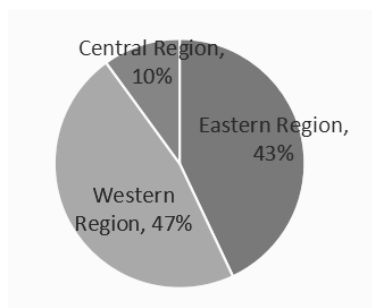


Figure 1. Spatial Distribution of the Number of Internet Celebrity Cities in China (2022). [Owner-draw]

The distribution of Internet celebrity cities in China closely aligns with the country's strategic development regions. According to the report, 60% of Internet celebrity cities are in major national strategic zones, including the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and the Yangtze River Economic Belt. This phenomenon results from

several contributing factors that create a favourable environment and conditions for the emergence of Internet celebrity cities.

Developed Regional Economy: Strong economic strength can support Internet celebrity cities in terms of infrastructure and tourism services, bringing abundant human and financial resources for their development.

Rich Tourism Resources: The cultural value assigned to national strategic development areas has become an important factor in the development of Internet celebrity cities. The rich historical heritage and natural scenery connect the Internet celebrity city to the national strategic development area closely.

National Policy Support: The national strategic development area is strongly supported by the national government through investment planning and other policy concessions, which cannot only increase the area's popular influence but also create a favourable environment for the development of tourism.

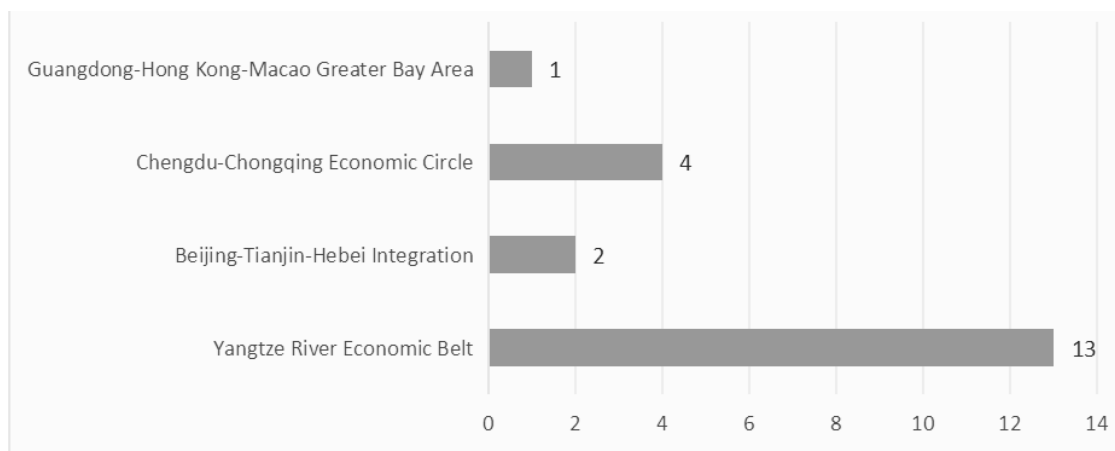


Figure 2. Number of Internet Celebrity Cities Overlapping with National Strategic Development Areas (2022). [Owner-draw]

3. ANALYSIS OF THE MARKETING STRATEGY OF INTERNET CELEBRITY CITIES

The key to successful marketing in an Internet celebrity city lies in the creation and dissemination of compelling city content [1]. Cities can establish a strong brand image and attract visitors by developing unique and engaging urban elements, such as iconic landmarks, creative events, and immersive cultural experiences. By strategically distributing city content and leveraging data analysis from the Internet and social media, cities can gain valuable insights into visitor sentiment and preferences. This information enables them to formulate adaptable and comprehensive marketing strategies that expand the city's reach and influence. This content creation and dissemination marketing model elevates the city's online presence and contributes to increased visitor traffic, further solidifying its position as a famous Internet celebrity city.

To create a compelling and influential city image, Internet celebrity cities leverage social media platforms to showcase their unique features and advantages. By integrating Internet celebrity resources with tourist attractions, they aim to captivate audiences with innovative and authentic content, sparking widespread dissemination and positive reputation effects across the Internet.

3.1. City Brand Positioning and Supporting

City brand positioning is the core of city development and city image establishment. It is the key to making the city stand out from the competition and a means to attract travellers, talent, and investment.

Creating a city brand needs to start from the city's reality and determine the appropriate direction of development based on factors such as geographic location, history and culture, social atmosphere, and industrial structure. Programs and measures to build an Internet celebrity city are the foundation and support for establishing a city's brand image. Actions such as establishing industrial advantages, organizing cultural activities, and improving infrastructure help to consolidate and deepen the establishment of a city's brand.

Taking Shenzhen, the city of reform and opening up, as an example, Shenzhen has established itself as a "city of science and technology innovation". This position has given full play to Shenzhen's geographic advantages and policy benefits, making Shenzhen one of the most famous cities in science and technology. Shenzhen has gained an inherent advantage in economic development based on its coastal location and proximity to Hong Kong, as well as the influence of reform and opening up. It established the Science and Technology Park, the Window of the World, the Red Cube Science and Technology Museum and other science-themed tourism projects and invested heavily in developing innovative technology, creating Tencent, ZTE, BYD and other technology enterprises. Shenzhen's approach to development has helped it attract many science enthusiasts and talent, making Shenzhen today a representative of "China's City of Science and Technology Innovation".

According to Shenzhen Special Zone News, the city's gross regional product in Shenzhen from January to October 2023 amounted to 244,682.5 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of 5.4%. Among them, the growth of high-tech investment was 73.7%, the output of new energy vehicles increased by 125.8%, and the output of service robots increased by 68.8%. This data reflects Shenzhen's focus on science and technology innovation and the development of new industries. Shenzhen continues to optimize its economic structure, further increasing the proportion of the tertiary industry in the total GDP. It is committed to making the technology and service industries the primary sources of Shenzhen's economic growth. The science and technology industry is the brand positioning that has made Shenzhen an Internet celebrity city. With its advantages in scientific research and technological innovation, Shenzhen has continued to improve its economic strength, innovation capacity and urban influence by vigorously developing its science and technology sector.

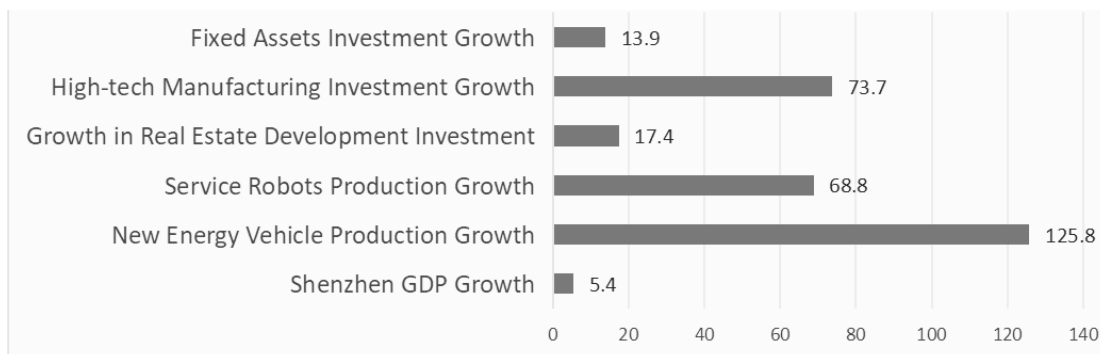


Figure 3. First Three Quarters of Production Increase Ratio in Shenzhen (2023). [Owner-draw]

3.2. Transformation of Consumption Patterns

One of the most effective ways to encourage consumption transformation and the upgrading of the urban economy is to replace the conventional retail model with a new consumer model. The conventional consumption pattern has altered due to the rapid development of the Internet. Thanks to the emergence of online payment methods, experiential consumption, and the sharing economy, people now have additional options for purchasing.

The Internet Celebrity cities need to realize the transformation of consumption patterns to promote industrial development and attract consumption by creating distinctive urban cultures. They rely on the advantages of social media platforms to introduce their products and services to attract consumers' interest and form a unique consumption pattern known as trend consumption. It refers to the

popularity of a particular product, culture or service over time, consumers' attention to this trend, and their willingness to purchase [2]. Trend consumption has a high degree of heat among particular groups of individuals and is characterized by fashionability and socialization. The connection between Internet Celebrity cities and trend consumption stems from the former serving as pop culture's aggregation place. They have formed a good relationship of mutual development among fashionable speciality products, individuals who capture trend elements, and trend-loving consumer groups [3]. The popular products and trendy culture created by Internet Celebrity cities have attracted many tourists to visit and consume, promoting the development of the city's economy and forming a favourable cultural atmosphere.

Changsha's local milk tea "ChaYanYueSe" has become one of the most popular brands, with its exquisite packaging design and novelty flavours have drawn popularity among consumers. "ChaYanYueSe" demonstrates Changsha's urban characteristics in product design, marketing and cultural connotations. In addition, Changsha has injected energetic elements such as trendy clothing stores, snack blocks, music festivals and e-sports activities for the vast number of young consumers, making it one of the Internet Celebrity cities loved by the youth.

Table 1. The Passenger Flow of Internet Celebrity Scenic Spots in Changsha During the May Day Holiday in 2023 and the Passenger Flow Compared with 2022. The popular activities in Changsha and the spread of fashion culture have promoted the overall passenger flow. [Owner-draw]

The Passenger Flow of Internet Celebrity Scenic Spots in Changsha During the May Day Holiday in 2023 and the Passenger Flow Compared with 2022			
Tourist Attractions in Changsha	Passenger flow (ten thousand people)	Year-on-year Growth from 2022	Specific Activities
Wangfujin	23.5	50%	Changsha Coffee Festival, The Movie "A Nightlife in Changsha"
The Beichen Grand Joy City	27.1	47.28%	Film Theme Market, Parent-child Interactive Activities
Changsha Jinmao Lanxiu City	35	50%	Shopping Festival
Haixin Square	36	250%	Illustration Exhibition
Total Passenger Flow	5306.295	117.47%	

Trend consumption is vital in boosting economic growth, creating consumer experiences, and creating a vibrant social atmosphere. The successful marketing strategies of Internet Celebrity cities must be distinct from the perception and action on trends.

3.3. Digital Marketing & Social Media Collaboration

The development and promotion of Internet Celebrity cities is the inevitable result of the advancement of social media cooperation. Cities can flexibly connect with the worldwide masses through the globally spread internet platform and build their images through social media.

Compared with digital marketing based on the Internet and electronic messaging technology, traditional marketing methods need more flexibility and broad dissemination, so it is not easy to adapt to the tendency of informatization and digitalization in modern society. Digital marketing can make use of the Internet's big data collation and push function to target audience groups and has the advantages of official-citizen interaction, real-time sharing and global coverage so that cities can

capture and harvest more people who are interested in their culture and characteristics, and achieve the effect of increasing tourist visits, promoting the city's brand, and expanding its influence [4].

In addition, the publicizing and promoting media and enterprises is inextricably linked to the growth of Internet Celebrity cities. The cities promote their marketing on the Internet by partnering with personal media that produces and publishes high-quality, high-value, and creative city-related content [5]. For example, major social media platforms that publish qualified travel tips, product sharing and insights can attract the masses and increase the influence of Internet celebrity cities.

In April 2023, Zibo BBQ dominated the top searches of Weibo, Xiaohongshu and other major social platforms with a high growth trend, and its ultra-high click rate, reading and search volume made Zibo, Shandong Province, one of the newest Internet Celebrity cities in 2023. The fame of Zibo BBQ is closely related to the continuous exposure and publicity of the media. Zibo barbecue has garnered much attention through the field experience of Zibo culture, ongoing personal media hype, and constant sharing of travel experiences. The publicity of Zibo barbecue has boosted the local economy and the development of significant industries, allowing Zibo to transform from a traditional industrial city to a new tourism service city.

Table 2. Main Indicators of Zibo City from January to June in 2023. [Owner-draw]

Main Indicators of Zibo City from January to June 2023			
Economic Indicator	Unit	Summation	Growth from 2022 (%)
Total Regional Product (GDP)	100 million Yuan	2295.4	5.3
Value-added of the Primary Industry	100 million Yuan	82.9	3.2
Value-added of the Secondary industry	100 million Yuan	1106.8	5.7
Value-added of the Tertiary Industry	100 million Yuan	1105.7	5.0
Total Retail Sales of Social Consumer Goods	100 million Yuan	639.4	9.7
Disposable Income of Residents (Per Capita)	Yuan	23177	6.5

4. THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNET CELEBRITY CITES

The development of Internet celebrity cities must maintain competition in business and publicity. The problems they face are mainly reflected in the level of sustainable development and homogenization of marketing strategies.

4.1. Sustainable Development

Internet Celebrity cities have some negative impacts while exploding in popularity, such as the lack of tourists' return rate, urban management problems, safety issues, and urban environmental pollution. None of these issues are conducive to creating long-lasting revenue and appeal for Internet Celebrity cities. Many tourists' awareness of some Internet Celebrity cities stays on the Internet publicity, and the behavior of tourists following the trend only creates a short turnover and false reputation for Internet Celebrity cities [6]. Getting tourists to be moved by the city's culture, getting the masses to compliment the city's image, and getting people to eliminate tourist behavior of following the trends are elements that need to be considered to achieve sustainable development in Internet Celebrity cities.

At the same time, the traffic and environmental problems created by a large number of tourists visiting can negatively affect the popularity of Internet Celebrity city. Some tourists have complained about the false publicity of attractions that do not match the reality shared on the Internet, long queues and the high prices of speciality products that do not match their actual value, all of which are detrimental to maintaining the brand image of Internet Celebrity cities.

4.2. Homogeneity of Marketing Strategies

Even though Internet Celebrity cities are committed to developing appropriate marketing strategies based on the city's characteristics, some phenomena of reduced freshness and creativity due to the similarity of strategies or templating of city development occur occasionally [7]. Internet Celebrity cities have shown a trend of homogenization in some marketing strategies and program planning, such as city music festivals, milk tea culture and food. These specific measures sometimes cannot help the marketing of Internet Celebrity cities; on the contrary, they will make it difficult for tourists to get a sense of freshness and curiosity, which will lead to a decline in the marketing effect. Internet Celebrity cities have lost their uniqueness in imitating and competing with each other, and to cater to consumers' short-lived preferences and make profits, they need to pay more attention to the importance of building their own distinctive culture.

5. SUMMARY

This article analyzes the marketing strategies of Chinese Internet Celebrity cities from three main aspects: brand positioning, consumption patterns and digital marketing. The case study concludes that the rise of Chinese Internet Celebrity cities first requires the creation of impressive tourist cities with cultural content, emphasizing the role of city brand positioning in establishing a unique city image and attracting tourists. Secondly, it is necessary to promote the transformation of the cities' consumption patterns, and emerging forms of consumption can bring more visitors and income to Internet Celebrity cities. Digital media plays an important role in publicizing Internet Celebrity cities, strengthening their visibility by cooperating with personal media and Internet platforms.

In the future, research aimed at the development of Internet Celebrity cities should focus more on the field of digitization. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, the sustainable development of Internet Celebrity cities can take advantage of artificial intelligence's robust data collection and analysis capabilities by analyzing consumer preferences and popular commodities to develop their future development path. While the Internet has brought dividends to Internet Celebrity cities, people should also realize that maintaining a stable reputation and uniqueness is essential for the sustainable development of Internet Celebrity cities. The development of Internet Celebrity cities can take advantage of the network platform through cultural output and innovation of cultural content to obtain constant fan attention and topics [8].

The sustainable development of Internet Celebrity cities is a process of continuous self-improvement. Marketing strategies need to highlight the cities' characteristics and content innovation and explore their development potential and social influence.

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