

Research on the Integrated Development of Sports Events and Tourism Industry in Kaizhou District, Chongqing from the Perspective of the Digital Economy

Xiaoya Huang

{huangxy@cque.edu.cn }

Chongqing University of Education, 1 Chongjiao Road, Nanshan street, Nan'an District, Chongqing, P.R.China

Abstract. With the continuous influence of the digital economy fields such as mobile internet, big data, and artificial intelligence, the deep integration of sports events and the tourism industry is increasingly profound. As an emerging industry, sports event tourism shows a strong momentum of development. This study employs methods including literature review and logical analysis to delve into the current status and issues of the integrated development of sports events and the tourism industry in Kaizhou District, Chongqing. Based on this analysis, the study proposes strategies for promoting the deep integration of sports events and the tourism industry in the digital economy era, focusing on building a product system, shaping brand image, and nurturing professional talents.

Keywords: digital economy, sports events, tourism industry, integration

1 Introduction

In the current stage of new historical development, the revolution of digital industrialization and industrial digitalization is flourishing. The digital economy is not only an intrinsic driving force for promoting quality, efficiency, and dynamic transformation but also a guiding force for the economic development of the new era. Since 2018, the role of the digital economy in driving the development of the tourism industry has gradually attracted attention from academia. The rise of the digital economy has highlighted the dominant role of tourists, altered the characteristics of the tourism industry value chain, and optimized the operational logic of the tourism sector^[1]. This is manifested in the promotion of industrial chain restructuring, value co-creation within the chain, and the extension of the industrial chain^[2]. Concurrently, attendance at sports events continues to rise^[3], the sports tourism market is experiencing astonishing growth at a rate of 30% to 40% in China. People's interest in sports activities and vacations is driving the development of the tourism industry and significantly altering its strategies^[4]. Small communities often have the capacity to attract sports fans and tourists through sporting events, thereby stimulating the development of their tourism industry^[5]. Small-scale as well as large-scale sporting events should be viewed as important aspects of marketing strategies aimed at improving quality, image, value, satisfaction and loyalty^[6]. However, due to the relatively short period of integrated development between the domestic sports and tourism industries, there is a

lack of relevant experience in the digital transformation of the sports tourism industry. Further in-depth research is needed on the integrated development of sports events and the tourism industry in the era of the digital economy.

In recent years, Kaizhou District has of Chongqing has made full use of the geographical environment of Hanfeng Lake and its surrounding resources to successfully organize a series of high-profile events such as marathons, dragon boat races, motorboat races, and winter swimming, which have effectively enhanced the city's image. Although Kaizhou District has initially developed a wealth of sports resources for event, its integrated development is still in the primary stage from the perspective of sports tourism. In the era of the digital economy, Kaizhou District needs to summarize the existing status quo of the integration of sports events and the tourism industry, analyze the existing problems, and explore how to fully utilize digital technology to deepen the integration effects between sports events and the tourism industry.

Therefore, this paper will comprehensively analyze the development of the integration of sports events and tourism industry in Kaizhou District from the perspective of digitalization demands. It will discuss strategies for promoting the deep integration of sports events and the tourism industry in the era of the digital economy, thereby optimizing the industrial layout of tourism in Kaizhou District and promoting the upgrading and enhancement of the tourism industry.

2 Current State of Integrated Development

2.1 Mechanisms of Integration

2.1.1 Sports Events Based on High-quality Tourism Resources

The development of sports events in Kaizhou District is founded on its exceptional natural resources. By introducing various sports events, the district enhances the visibility of its resources, builds a strong tourism brand image, and achieves industry integration.

Firstly, the district vigorously develops water sports projects by leveraging its extensive water resources in Hanfeng Lake. The vast water area of Hanfeng Lake offers unique advantages for the development of water sports. Currently, Kaizhou District has utilized Hanfeng Lake's resources to host major events such as lakeside marathons, motorboat races, fishing, and swimming. These events include both internationally acclaimed sports events to attract visitors from around the world and local participation-based sports events to draw visitors from neighboring areas. Secondly, local topography resources are utilized to develop sports projects. In 2020, Kaizhou Longtouzui Forest Park hosted the first Wanda Mountain Trail Running Challenge, integrating various resources such as the mountainous terrain, forests, and natural landscapes. This not only enriches the summer tourism activities of Kaizhou but also aligns with the trend of integrating sports events and tourism in Kaizhou. Additionally, based on local cultural tourism resources, events like the "Climbing High on the Ninth Day" and dragon boat races have been developed. These highly participatory and entertaining sports events synergistically promote both sports and cultural tourism, contributing to the convergence of sports and tourism.

2.1.2 Sports Events Concentrate in Peak Seasons of Tourism

Through the analysis of historical sports events in Kaizhou, it was discovered that a significant portion of these events are concentrated during the peak tourist seasons, especially around the one-month period before and after public holidays, see **Figure 1**. From 2017 to 2022, various sports events in Kaizhou District were primarily held during the spring and autumn peak tourism seasons, laying the groundwork for the smooth execution of these events and the influx of visitors. On one hand, leveraging the favorable conditions of peak tourism seasons ensures a substantial number of visitors and attention during the events. On the other hand, using these events as opportunities attracts a large number of tourists to Kaizhou, either to experience the events or to be part of the audience, thereby further increasing visitor flow and boosting the growth of the tourism industry.



Fig. 1. Time Distribution of Sports Events Held in Kaizhou District from 2017 to 2022

2.1.3 Multi-sector Cooperation

To foster the development of sports tourism in Kaizhou, the strong support from higher-level departments such as the National Aquatic Sports Management Center and the Chongqing Municipal Sports Bureau, has been invaluable. The Kaizhou District Cultural and Tourism Commission has actively undertaken comprehensive coordination efforts. Collaborations have been established with various departments including the District Transportation Bureau, Hanfeng Lake Management Committee, Kaiqian Group, and Hushan Investment Group. This collaborative effort ensures the ongoing organization of prominent sports events, while simultaneously striving to establish a national aquatic sports base and a national sports industry demonstration base.

Furthermore, before the commencement of the events, cooperation with Kaizhou's integrated media, Kaizhou Radio and Television Station, Chongqing TV, Sohu, and other media outlets is crucial for promotional activities and follow-up reporting. During the events, integration with industries closely related to tourism, such as travel agencies, hotels, and tourist attractions, provide convenient services for visitors in terms of dining, accommodation, transportation, shopping, and entertainment. The successful development of sports tourism relies heavily on government support, social investment, and the contributions of tourism enterprises. Multi-sector cooperation between the government and enterprises serves as the foundation for the integrated development of sports and tourism in Kaizhou.

2.2 Methods of Integrated Development

2.2.1 Introducing Renowned Brand Events

Kaizhou employs the approach of introducing projects by hosting well-known domestic and international sports events with certain fame and influence. This strategy attracts a large number of tourists, thereby exploring the industry integration model of "sports events + tourism." In 2018, the half marathon race organized by the Municipal Sports Bureau, the District People's Government, the District Culture Committee, the District Tourism Bureau, and Kaizhou Hushan Culture Tourism (Group) Co., Ltd., attracted nearly 4,000 marathon runners and enthusiasts from seven countries around the globe, and 27 provinces and cities across the country. During the event, a series of cultural and tourism activities of "Romantic Kaizhou in Full Bloom" flower viewing tourism products was launched, with many attractions offering free or discounted tickets to participants. In 2017, the "Tianzhi Pharmaceutical Cup" Hanfeng Lake International Motorboat Race attracted over 200 motorboat enthusiasts from 21 countries. The district government planned the "Tourism Benefit Experience Week," the "Water Rhythm, Fragrance of Kaizhou" autumn tourism festival, and international food and specialty goods exhibitions, promoting tourism consumption growth.

Renowned brand sports events are large in scale, highly professional, and involve numerous professional athletes, hobby athletes, coaches, and event spectators^[7]. As a result, staging high-profile fixtures are increasingly being seen as a prominent method of strengthening a destination's domestic and international image^[8]. Participants and spectators often come from different countries and regions. Hosting these events not only showcases Kaizhou's development and abundant tourism resources on the international stage but also focuses global attention on Kaizhou, thereby driving the development of its tourism industry.

2.2.2 Organizing Recreational Sports Events

Based on local traditional folk activities, Kaizhou District integrates resources to launch a series of regional recreational sports events, further stimulating the demand for sports tourism experiences. On one hand, fitness activities for the general public, such as the "Climbing competition on the Ninth Day of the First Lunar Month," are organized in tandem with the Cultural Tourism Festival. This activity, rooted in Kaizhou's long-standing folk tradition and unique cultural customs. Traditionally, on the ninth day of the first lunar month, local people climb to pray and offer birthday wishes to the Jade Emperor. Over time, this event has evolved into a climbing activity that is passed down through generations. Through cooperation between the district government and the China Construction Bank, the activity on the ninth day of the first lunar month has become a significant leisure tourism project in Kaizhou, attracting numerous citizens and possessing significant social influence. On the other hand, based on the 2,000-year-old cultural heritage of the Dragon Boat Festival, Kaizhou District hosts the Hanfeng Lake Dragon Boat Race series, including the "Wan-da-Kai" district's Dragon Boat Invitational Race and the Farmers' Dragon Boat Race. These events attract participants from various regions, backgrounds, and sectors, enhancing their sense of participation and experience. These self-developed sports events draw citizens from Chongqing and neighboring provinces and regions to Kaizhou for tourism.

2.3 Benefits of Integrated Development

2.3.1 Economic Benefits

In recent years, Kaizhou District has seen a significant increase in the number of visitors and a continuous growth in regional tourism revenue due to the continuous hosting of sports brand events, see **Table 1**. The "Tianzhi Pharmaceutical Cup" Hanfeng Lake International Motorboat Race was held on October 6, 2017. On that day, Kaizhou District received 233,000 visitors, resulting in a comprehensive tourism income of 1.5 billion yuan. Because the event coincided with China's National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival in 2017, the overall number of visitors from October 1 to October 8 was 889,000, generating a comprehensive tourism income of 5.8 billion yuan. The one-day tourism revenue from the Motorboat Race accounted for 25.86% of the total tourism income during the eight-day holiday period, demonstrating significant economic benefits.

Table 1. Tourist Numbers and Tourism Revenue in Kaizhou District from 2017 to 2022¹

Year	Number of Tourists (10,000 persons)	Growth Rate	Tourism Revenue (100 million yuan)	Growth Rate
2017	803	23.0%	48.38	23.4%
2018	903	12.5%	55.68	15.1%
2019	1069	18.4%	64.57	16.0%
2020	1104	3.3%	65.02	0.7%
2021	1242	12.5%	77.69	19.5%
2022	1178	-5.2%	78.23	0.7%

In April 2018, Kaizhou District hosted its first half marathon race, attracting a total of 458,000 visitors during the event and generating a comprehensive tourism income of 2.8 billion yuan. In comparison, during the May Day holiday period in 2018, Kaizhou District received a total of 383,000 visitors, resulting in tourism revenue of 2.1 billion yuan. Compared to the marathon race, there was a 33.33% decrease in both visitor numbers and tourism income, see **Figure 2**. In terms of both visitor numbers and tourism income, the marathon race, as an international event, brought in significantly more revenue compared to the situation when Kaizhou District did not have sports events.

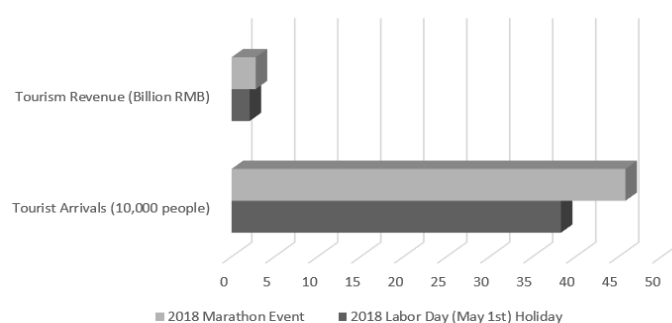


Fig. 2. Tourist Numbers and Revenue During the 2018 Marathon Event and Labor Day Holiday

¹ Data Source: Compiled from annual government work reports of Kaizhou District government.

2.3.2 Social Benefits

During the hosting of various major sports events, media outlets such as Chongqing TV, Tencent, and Hualong Net competed to report on them. The Kaizhou Broadcasting and Television Station's WeChat platform witnessed a continuous increase in news reposts, with up to 10 million viewers during live broadcasts. Discussion and interest in the events increased substantially in a short period, further enhancing the recognition and popularity of Kaizhou. Additionally, hosting sports events prompted Kaizhou District to focus on improving the overall athletic abilities of its youth. The district carried out widespread talent selection and training, vigorously promoted a model that combines sports and education, and effectively integrated training and competition. This provided young athletes with better training and allowed for the cultivation of emerging sports disciplines while maintaining traditional strengths.

2.3.3 Ecological Benefits

To ensure the successful hosting of sports events and the sustainable development of the entire regional tourism industry, Kaizhou District undertook urban restoration and ecological restoration efforts. Firstly, they implemented the Hanfeng Lake low-lying sewage collection and discharge project, focusing on ecological environmental protection. Responsibility lists were established for 46 district-level government departments, 40 towns and townships, and 535 villages and communities, creating a three-level environmental supervision system at the district, town, and village levels. The River Chief and Lake Chief systems were comprehensively implemented, with 160 rivers in the district included in the River Chief system, and district-town-village-level River Chiefs conducting regular river inspections.

Secondly, efforts were made to plant trees and carry out afforestation around the Hanfeng Lake National Wetland Park. By 2020, the green coverage rate in Kaizhou urban area reached 53.8%, with air quality being good for more than 351 days per year on average. PM2.5 levels decreased by 9% compared to previous years, and the water quality in the lake remained stable at Class III. This provided a favorable environment for various sports events, especially water sports, and simultaneously accelerated the overall improvement of Kaizhou District's ecological environment.

3 Challenges of Integration from the Perspective of Digital Economy

3.1 The Limited Degree of Industrial Integration

In the era of the digital economy, industry integration is presenting a trend of diversification and deepening. Despite Kaizhou District's active promotion of sports events, centered around Hanfeng Lake to establish event brands, the integration of sports events and the tourism industry remains at a preliminary stage. Resource development is not profound, leading to a lack of diversity and innovation in sports tourism products^[9].

On one hand, Hanfeng Lake in Kaizhou introduces several internationally renowned events, primarily spectator-oriented, resulting in a limited scope of sports tourism products centered around "watching + sightseeing," leading to an inferior tourist experience. On the other hand, locally-based participatory events lack distinctiveness and have limited attraction. Although events are combined with tourism attractions and cultural festivals, related tourism products

primarily revolve around food festivals and exhibitions, indicating narrow development approaches, insufficient creativity, and low-quality tourism product offerings.

3.2 The Undefined Brand Image of Sports Tourism

In the era of the digital economy, the integration of sports events and the tourism industry necessitates a clear development positioning, coupled with effective use of digital means for branding and promotion, fostering a professional sports tourism brand image.

Firstly, the lack of a clear positioning and planning for the integrated development of sports events and the tourism industry in Kaizhou hampers cooperative efforts, which often remain limited to individual activities, constraining synergies between industries and lacking comprehensive integration. Secondly, the existing sports tourism brand image has not been well established, resulting in suboptimal market communication. While the "Beautiful Township and Beautiful Lake, Happy Kaizhou" brand emphasizes local characteristics, but the relevance of tourism and with sports event is not strong, and fails to show the allure of sports events and the attractiveness of tourism effectively. This makes it challenging for sports tourism products in Kaizhou to stand out in a competitive market.

3.3 The Lack of Professionals for Sports Tourism

Professional talent serves as a fundamental guarantee for the integrated development of sports events and the tourism industry. However, Kaizhou District lacks an adequate reserve of professionals for sports and tourism integration, and specialized organizational structures for sports tourism, unable to meet the demands of the digital economy era's integration of sports events and tourism.

Firstly, there is a shortage of relevant enterprises in the sports tourism field in Kaizhou, especially larger-scale ones. According to data from the Enterprise Check website, currently, only Chongqing Hushan Culture Tourism Development Co., Ltd. is engaged in related activities, with fewer than one hundred employees. This clearly cannot sustain the deep integration of sports and tourism industries. Secondly, the deep integration of sports and tourism industries requires digitally skilled and diversified professionals. With the development of sports tourism in Kaizhou, the demand spans professionals well-versed in both tourism and sports domains, as well as hybrid talents with knowledge of the digital economy, market operations, and business management. Only by nurturing professionals who comprehend the synergy of sports and tourism in the digital age can sustainable, high-quality development of sports tourism be achieved in Kaizhou.

4 Strategies for Integration from the Perspective of Digital Economy

4.1 Enrich Sports Tourism Product System, Create Digital Tourism Experiences

Firstly, based on the unique resources of Hanfeng Lake in Kaizhou District, introduce diverse sports and athletic events. By segmenting water resources, blend different functions such as sports, leisure, and entertainment, create a variety of water-based recreational facilities, implement a strategy that combines land, water, and air transportations, and craft a diverse array of water-based tourism products to enhance visitor experiences. Additionally, in conjunction

with Kaizhou's topography and forest resources, gradually develop mountain sports, health and fitness events, and other sports tourism products, building a comprehensive system of sports tourism products. Secondly, drive innovative applications of digital technology in sports tourism products. Utilize new technologies like 5G, VR, AI, cloud computing, etc., to enhance the visual appeal and interactivity of sports events, elevating the spectator experience. Furthermore, establish a regional digital service platform for sports tourism, deeply integrating sports events with tourism resources, offering personalized and customized digital sports tourism services to visitors. Through the analysis of visitor data, comprehend their preferences, provide accurate recommendations for sports tourism products, deliver real-time event information, scientifically plan sports tourism itineraries, and cater to the experiential needs of visitors in the digital age.

4.2 Establish Distinctive Sports Tourism Brands, Strengthen Digital Marketing and Promotion

In the era of the digital economy, data becomes a critical resource for brand construction and development. Utilize digital means to collect visitor feedback, behavioral data, and other information, deeply understand market demands, and precisely adjust brand positioning. Moreover, expert teams or professional planning teams can be invited to conduct field research and planning, thereby establishing a unique sports tourism brand. Concurrently, employ technologies such as big data, mobile internet, 5G, etc., to conduct internet-based, prize-winning brand positioning campaigns, extensively collecting public proposals, or collaborate with universities to host planning contests, utilizing multiple channels to gather creative ideas, comprehensively constructing a distinctive sports tourism brand.

In the era of the digital economy, brand construction and promotion increasingly rely on digital means. Effective channelling of information could reach and exploit sport tourism market, and could support effective marketing strategies for destinations seeking to enrich their local tourism experience^[10]. Firstly, establish tourism service platforms on platforms like WeChat, Weibo, official websites, and public accounts, leveraging social media and online channels to digitally position and promote the brand, creating a sports tourism brand with broad influence. Secondly, launch sports tourism products on national well-known online platforms such as Ctrip, Lvmama, and Qunar, promoting the new image of Kaizhou's comprehensive tourism in multifaceted, multiform, and multichannel ways.

4.3 Cultivate Professionals for Sports Tourism, Enhance Digital Talent Reserves

The cultivation of professional talent is a central topic for developing sports tourism. It is necessary to provide adequate education and training to sport event staff and volunteers^[11]. and the era of the digital economy provides abundant resources for training multifaceted talent for industry integration and organizational development. Firstly, the digital economy underscores data sharing and collaborative innovation. By facilitating open data sharing, attract more innovators and entrepreneurs to participate in the development of the sports tourism industry, promoting profound integration and innovation-driven development. Secondly, in the context of the integration of sports events and tourism industry, utilize online educational platforms to offer specialized courses related to sports tourism, fostering multifaceted talents who possess not only expertise in sports and tourism but also digital skills, better adapting to the demands of integrated industry development. Additionally, establish appropriate policies for talent attraction, actively recruit professionals with digital technology backgrounds, drive innovative

development in the sports events and tourism industry, and meet the talent needs for the integrated development of sports events and tourism in Kaizhou.

5 Conclusion

The rise of the digital economy presents valuable opportunities for the profound integration of sports events and the tourism industry in Kaizhou District. Leveraging its high-quality tourism resources, capitalizing on peak tourist seasons, and securing cooperation between government and enterprises, Kaizhou District has developed sports tourism through introducing renowned brand events and organizing leisure sports events. However, in the process of integrating sports events and the tourism industry, challenges persist, including the limited degree of industrial integration, unclear sports tourism brand image and a lack of professional talents. Drawing from the context of the digital economy era, this study has proposed integration strategies, such as enriching the sports tourism product system to foster digital tourism experiences, establishing distinctive sports tourism brands, strengthening digital marketing and promotion, and cultivating professional talent for sports tourism, in order to address these challenges.

In conclusion, Kaizhou District has the potential to harness the digital economy to facilitate the deep integration of sports events and the tourism industry. By implementing the suggested strategies, Kaizhou can unlock the full potential of sports tourism, enhance visitor experiences, establish a clear brand image, and create a vibrant ecosystem where sports events and tourism thrive in harmony.

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