



Unveiling Risks and Challenges: The Attention Economy and China's Tourism Cultural and Creative Innovations

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Abstract. Following the rise of the economic effect of the attention economy in the digital information era in China, the tourism resources in China are in the face of the impact from the network space. Before discussing the strategy to overcome these risks, define what the risks are supposed to be a essential and necessary question. In this paper, the investigator is going to have an in-depth analysis of two recent internet-famous tourism events in China through cases study and literature analysis. Finding the potential risks of unpredictability, unsustainability, and discuss the logic of losing creativity in innovation during the cultural and creative exploration of tourism resources.

Keywords: Attention economy, Digital information era, Tourism resource, Influencer, Creative supplier, Network traffic.

1 Introduction

In China, the era of digital economy has already developed into a relatively mature stage, the added value of China's digital economy was account for 7.8% of GDP by 2020. Following the continuous development of digital technology and market scale, the attention economy of network traffic has penetrated into almost all walks of life in China, and become a vital driving force for the development in cultural and creative industries of China's tourism resources, it has given birth to new paths of cultural and creative tourism development, such as "Influencer", "Internet-famous" as well. This has enabled the tourism resources in the actual economy and the internet space of the virtual economy to establish a link based on network traffic, thus promoting the gradual digital transformation of tourism cultural and creative development. Against the background of deep integration of the internet and industries, the innovative development of cultural and creative tourism resources has become an important issue in the context of the digital economy era. The following text will discusses the impact and influence of the attention economy on the innovative development of this industry from two aspects: the role and results of the attention economy in the cultural and creative tourism resources industry.

Since the 1980s, the UNESCO has spread the concept of the creative economy around the world, and the cultural industry is closely related to the creative economy.

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Therefore, the cultural and creative industry has also attracted considerable attention from the market and consumers in China. Based on the Chinese definition of cultural creativity, it refers to the process and related products of reinterpreting and creating (i.e., creative transformation) cultural themes with broad appeal and systematic approaches through innovative methods. Among them, cultural and creative derivatives that meet the criteria of "originating from cultural themes, transformed through creativity, and possessing market value" are referred to as cultural and creative products[1]. Broadly speaking, the cultural and creative industry encompasses various cultural products with multiple carriers such as films, tourism, entertainment, and merchandise. The development of innovative cultural and creative products that are more appealing to consumers has always been the pursuit of creative suppliers in various regions for the industry. In the context of the attention economy, the rise and development of new economic models such as "Internet+", influencers, memes, and network traffic trends have provided more extensive development momentum and innovative potential for cultural and creative products that are themed on culture and transformed through creativity as a medium.

This article aims to summarize two typical cases in China's tourism cultural and creative industry in recent years through case studies, text analysis, and data analysis methods, seeking potential risks triggered by traffic in typical failed cases.

2 Literature Review

The network traffic based attention economy is a testament to the digital information era of human society, a product of the information bond between individuals, and carries the shared goal of protecting tourism resources and satisfying tourists' needs. The development of the digital economy has brought tremendous opportunities for innovative development in China's tourism cultural and creative industry, and the transformational impacts of digitization, informatization, and networking are continuously being reflected in this industry. Some scholars have conducted detailed discussions on the manifestations of the attention economy in tourism industry, resource development, temporal and spatial evolution, product design, and other aspects. However, there is relatively little targeted research on the obstacles posed by the attention economy to the innovative development of China's tourism cultural and creative industry. Among them, Lun-feng and Rui explored from the perspective of influencer that this new economic model of the attention economy can become an important fulcrum for the development of rural cultural tourism[2]. Ming-shui and others analyzed that the attention economy has helped tourism resources and the tourism industry structure to form cultural and creative tourism products that can change with consumer demand[3]. Shu-min's study of the cultural and creative development of the Forbidden City found that in the context of the internet era, it is necessary to change and innovate communication concepts, and innovate cultural dissemination methods and channels[4]. Yang and others proposed that "cultural and creative products should be distinguished from the formulaic and unoriginal factory-style production of 'fast food'"[5]. Overall, existing research generally focuses on the positive role of the attention economy in tourism cultural and creative

development, while relatively neglecting potential negative factors, especially in protecting the reputation of tourism resources themselves. Moreover, insufficient attention has been paid to the impact and challenges posed by the attention economy on the innovative development of the cultural and creative industry.

This article aims to explore the impact of the attention economy on the innovative development of this industry, identify common issues caused by network traffic in typical failure cases, discuss the damage and impact on the reputation of attractions themselves, and infer the potential obstacles posed by the attention economy to the innovative development of China's tourism cultural and creative industry.

3 Material

On Nov 11, 2020, Tenzin Tsundue became an overnight sensation after a seven-second short video about him, a Tibetan youth, was posted by a Douyin user. A local state-owned cultural and tourism enterprise promptly signed Tenzin, and within a few weeks, the tourism promotional video for Litang County in Sichuan Province, titled "The World of Tenzin", starring Tenzin, was aired. The network traffic effect generated by Tenzin significantly boosted the local tourism economy in the short term. In the first year after Tenzin appeared in people's vision, the tourism revenue of Litang County in Sichuan Province driven by him increased by 72.4% YoY. However, the internet's double-edged sword quickly manifested in Tenzin's case. Issues such as unconditional employment by state-owned enterprises, "using their good looks as a crutch for their lack of ability", and over-beautification of his image sparked widespread public debate. By 2022, negative public opinion surrounding Tenzin continued to ferment, and lots of malicious remarks such as "speeding pass Litang," targeting Litang County in Ganzi Prefecture. These negative evaluations of Tenzin were transferred to the region, causing a negative impact on the reputation of local culture. This made it difficult for Litang County, which originally boasted rich tourism resources and profound cultural heritage, to recover its image on the internet in the short term, objectively suppressing the potential for innovative development in local cultural and creative industries.

Similarly, the "follow suit" phenomenon caused by the attention economy in the cultural and creative industry has also had a double-edged sword effect. As Jean Gabriel Tarde stated, "imitation and invention are one of the most basic social behaviors in social life"[6]. The internet era, filled with others' consumption behaviors in cyberspace, creates an atmosphere of collective consumption. Group consumption often means conformity, which is built on creative suppliers actively integrating into the marketing model of the attention economy[7]. This conformity is manifested in various forms in the cultural and creative industry, with the "wind of missing you" road signs being a prime example. On April 11, 2023, People's Daily published an article on Weibo titled "When 'wind of missing you' blowing across the river north and south.....", which received millions of reads, which received millions of reads. The article pointed out that this marketing approach objectively demonstrated that businesses, as the mainstay of cultural and creative industries, only cared about good business and the pursuit of network traffic, with no cultural foundation whatsoever[8].

In recent years, significant economic benefits driven by the network traffic based attention economy have enticed various cultural and creative suppliers to fall into the trap of this economy, abandoning the creativity inherent in cultural and creative endeavors. Deviations from the basic interpretation of cultural themes, creative transformation, and market value have become common occurrences, such as homogeneity in resource development, similar product creativity, overlapping development projects, and imitation in business models. However, observations have revealed profound reasons for the lack of innovative development capabilities in the cultural and creative industry, including resource dependency on upstream industries, occasional uncontrollable subjective factors et al.[9]. These multiple reasons collectively form obstacles to innovative development. This article argues that whether it is due to the requirements of the times, subjective unpredictability, dependence on brand resources of tourist attractions, or the lack of innovation driven by the development momentum of innovative development, the influence of the word "network traffic" cannot be ignored. The new era background driven by the attention economy has changed the mode of market competition. Subjective factors such as key opinion leaders and influencers have a strong impact on network traffic, and traffic plays an inducing role in all of this. Although the current "era of network traffic" is no longer a pejorative term, signifying diversified communication channels, personalized communication subjects, and fragmented communication value[10], "Network Traffic" itself is constantly bringing economic benefits to the cultural and creative industry while consuming the cultural value of tourism resources. Therefore, how to reasonably utilize network traffic resources and deconstruct the promotion and challenges of the attention economy era on the innovative development of the cultural and creative industry is a difficult problem faced by the innovative development of China's tourism resources, which is of great significance for promoting the innovative development of China's tourism resource cultural and creative industry.

4 Risks and Challenges in the Innovative Development of Tourism Cultural and Creative Industries under the Background of Attention Economy

4.1 Potentially subjective unpredictability and instability

Since the entrance of 21st century, the population of the social media started the key trends appear especially pronounced, the social media platforms facilitate both of participation and practices of self-branding in the Internet space[11]. Following the growth of digital information era, network traffic leading the key trends engaged into cultural creative industry as well. In China, this trend has become extremely popular following the rise of the social media platforms for instance the TikTok, Weibo, and Bilibili as well, and the key trends even becoming a gainful method for government department, and that's what Litang county did in Nov 2020, the Litang County Culture Tourism Sports Investment Development Co. LTD which is a local state-owned company in Litang signed an influencer, Tenzin Tsundue. As the former context talked, a series of

events happened to Tenzin and Litang, the whole process indicated an enormous potential and unstable risk for the whole cultural creative exploration in China's tourism industry.

An opinion leader, in other word, an influencer will able to play a significant role in the public opinion[12], much less in the Internet space, the information cascades could sometimes be shaken more easily. Those influencers are able to generate information cascades online depend on their own opinions, so it always tend to be more sporadical and unstable. Meanwhile, the users who use newer or less fluential description can cause breakouts because of the subject matter, topic, timing, format, and trustworthiness of the message. Overall, the emergence of information cascades is highly unpredictable[13].

4.2 Sustainability risk of Traffic Economy to Brand Reputation

As a Journal of Management article noted 20 years ago, an organization's "reputation is perhaps one of its most important strategic resources"[14]. Reputation of the tourism resources is supposed to be paid attention in the duration of the creative cultural exploration of tourism resources, but tourism resource is not a unlimited resource, it requires the sustainability for a long-term development and protection, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) considers sustainable development as a process of exploitation that is allowed without depletion or destruction of resources. The sustainable development of tourism resources implies achieving economic benefits while ensuring effective resource management. In this context, the acquisition of benefits should be preceded by the efficient utilization and management of resources[15]. Therefore, the cultural and creative development of tourism resources should prioritize protection, over the economic benefits. It is not advisable to extract economic interests through the degradation of reputation resources, as this would violate the original intention of tourism resource development.

Within the background of the digital information era, where public opinion and network traffic intersect, once managers fail to maintain reasonable control over tourism resources, the situation may trespass into unpredictable directions that could potentially harm the resources. As of April 2024, even though the attention on the incident has subsided, searching for the keyword "Litang County" on Bilibili, one of the major video-sharing websites in China, still reveals a preponderance of satirical videos related to Litang and Tenzin. Similar satirical content, such as "Speeding Pass Litang" and "The Highest County in the World," can also be found with varying frequencies on major social media platforms like Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo. This phenomenon objectively demonstrates the lingering impact of malicious traffic events and the damage to the reputation of tourism resources. This paper argues that such events constitute a depletion of tourism resources, which will persist.

A unique and positive reputation serves as a potential source of sustainable competitive advantage for economic benefits[16] and is a crucial component of tourism resources. Cultural and creative actions and products that damage the brand reputation of tourism resources pose long-term sustainability risks.

4.3 The Large-scale Production Driven by Network Traffic Has Resulted in Blind Conformity and Following Trends in the Development of Cultural and Creative Products

Liwei et al. analysed that the large-scale production by the creative suppliers for a same products is one of the underlying causes of homogenization phenomenon in tourist towns[9]. In the digital information era, network traffic is closely related to the demand for goods. An increase in demand implies that people are willing to pay higher prices for goods, which in turn leads to an increase in supply[17]. However, in the realm of information, attention serves as the equivalent of price. The rise in attention towards a certain item drives the growth of demand for it, but it also prompts an increase in supply. This results in the systemic inundation of cultural and creative products that rely on the attention economy.

A typical example is the "wind of missing you" road signs that gained rapid popularity in mainland China in May 2022. Leveraging China's advanced productive capacity and the speed of information dissemination on the internet, the "viral" cultural and creative design was quickly disseminated among all creative suppliers in China, leading to the widespread popularity of such designs, including the "viral" road sign, throughout the country. Following the increase of the similar products and product variations are available in the market at each day, the process of Product Life Cycle (PLC) will be accelerated as well[18]. Due to these internet-famous or "instagrammable" things go through all the processes of PLC speedily with a thrust by the network traffic, they will outgrow their usefulness, and the demand for its services start to the decline in a short term[19]. In less than a year, Chinese consumers have gobbled up the repetitive marketing gimmick of internet-famous sign, but Repeated consumption is often considered a major barrier to lasting satisfaction[20]. Yi et al. noted that the quantity, frequency, and continuity of consumption is the three main factor to shape the physical sense of satiation[21]. And what happened to the internet-famous sign is be set in almost each tourist attraction repetitively within a extremely similar content and design, that is also the reason why the internet-famous sign was been criticized by central media[8] and society in such a short period of less than a year in China.

5 Conclusion

The scope of tourism resources is extensive, encompassing all natural resources, cultural resources, and social resources that possess touristic appeal, as well as capital resources that support their development and advancement. In China, due to the dual incentives of capital profit-seeking and reliance on online traffic, the development process of the cultural and creative industries of tourism resources is difficult to escape the potential risks that the era background may pose to their innovative development. This study believes that while KOLs and influencers are increasingly active in cyberspace, attracting followers through online platforms and gaining and selling attention to generate revenue may seem to create a "win-win-win" situation for the platform, individuals, and enterprises. However, in the context of the new era, especially for innovative development industries such as the tourism cultural and creative industry, potential

risks continue to proliferate. This study focuses on discussing two recent failed cases of tourism resource development.

Nevertheless, given the complexities of the issues that network traffic may pose to innovation in the current era, this study has not identified the most common root causes of the problems nor proposed reasonable suggestions to overcome the influence of network traffic. Cultural and creative activities are meant to safeguard the value of tourism resources, and combining digital expressions will facilitate the dissemination of their cultural value. Even if they become popular through network traffic, their popularity is fleeting. After all, success does not come overnight; it requires consistent effort over time.

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