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Research on New Drivers of Event Consumption and Strategies for High-Quality Development

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Abstract: This study examines the new drivers of event consumption and strategies for high-quality development in the context of Wenzhou's evolving event economy. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis and case studies, the research identifies five key drivers propelling event consumption: the experience economy, digital transformation, social-cultural engagement, sustainability and health consciousness, and policy-infrastructure support. The findings reveal how Wenzhou has successfully leveraged its unique economic characteristics and cultural assets to develop a robust event ecosystem that generates significant economic benefits while addressing urban development goals. The study further identifies major challenges including event homogenization, intellectual property protection, talent shortages, and environmental sustainability concerns. Based on these findings, the research proposes a comprehensive framework and tailored strategies for event organizers, government bodies, and destination marketing organizations to optimize event economy development. The Wenzhou case offers valuable insights for other cities seeking to harness the power of event economy for sustainable urban transformation, demonstrating how strategic integration of local advantages with modern consumption trends can create synergistic effects for high-quality development.

Keywords: event economy; high-quality development; consumption drivers; urban transformation; sustainable development

1. Introduction

The global event economy has emerged as a vital engine for urban development and economic transformation, transcending its traditional role as mere entertainment. Major sporting events, cultural festivals, and large-scale conferences are now strategically leveraged by cities worldwide to stimulate consumption, enhance city branding, and foster industrial upgrading. This phenomenon represents a shift from quantity-oriented growth to a more sustainable and integrated model of high-quality development, where the value is measured not only in direct revenue but also in long-term social, cultural, and economic benefits [1]. In China, this trend is particularly evident. The post-pandemic era has witnessed a surge in public demand for immersive, experiential, and high-quality cultural and sporting activities. Event consumption has become a powerful new driver of domestic demand, injecting fresh momentum into the national economy. Post-pandemic urban development emphasizes public space adaptations to ensure safety, comfort, and immersive experiences for participants [2]. High-quality cultural and sporting activities contribute to social engagement and experiential consumption, enhancing the city's cultural capital and

residents' participation [3]. Against this backdrop, the city of Wenzhou provides a compelling and valuable case study. Historically renowned for its vibrant private economy and manufacturing prowess, Wenzhou has actively embraced this new trend. By successfully hosting a series of high-profile events, from international marathons and sporting competitions to major commercial and cultural conferences, the city is strategically leveraging its economic characteristics to forge a new path of growth. Collaboration and trust among local enterprises and event organizers play a key role in ensuring efficient resource sharing and event success [4]. This paper aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by delving into the Wenzhou example. The study will analyze the unique drivers—such as the synergy with local private enterprises, the role of digital integration, and the pursuit of experiential quality—that are fueling event consumption in the region. Furthermore, it will diagnose the challenges encountered and, most importantly, propose an actionable framework of strategies. By doing so, this paper seeks to offer valuable insights and a replicable reference for other cities in China and beyond that are exploring how to harness the power of the event economy for sustainable and high-quality urban development [5].

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Event Economy Research

The event economy, particularly in the context of sports events, has been extensively studied through various theoretical lenses. Three core theories provide a robust foundation for analyzing the mechanisms and impacts of event consumption and high-quality development.

Firstly, the Experience Economy theory emphasizes that modern consumption transcends the purchase of tangible goods, evolving towards the pursuit of memorable, personalized, and immersive experiences. In the context of event economy, this theory explains consumers' growing preference for experiential offerings around events, such as unique atmospheres, cultural interactions, and emotional engagement. Secondly, Consumer Behaviour Theory offers insights into the decision-making processes of event attendees. Studies indicate that event consumption is influenced by a complex interplay of factors including income levels, social motivations, and perceived value. Notably, research on Chinese event economy reveals that the core constraint on sports consumption is not willingness but income level and industrial structure. Lastly, the theory of Destination Competitiveness highlights how events serve as catalysts for enhancing a city's appeal by improving its infrastructure, service quality, and overall brand image. Successful events integrate a destination's unique cultural and economic assets to create a competitive advantage that extends beyond the event itself.

2.2. Key Concepts and Evolution of Event Consumption

A clear understanding of key concepts is crucial. "Event Consumption" refers to the expenditure and activities undertaken by individuals and organizations related to event participation, encompassing ticket purchases, merchandise, tourism, and ancillary services. "New Drivers" denote the contemporary forces propelling this consumption, such as digital integration, the demand for immersive experiences, and the emphasis on health and sustainability. "High-Quality Development" in the event economy context moves beyond mere scale expansion. It emphasizes sustainable growth, value-added services, industrial integration, and inclusive benefits, aiming for long-term economic vitality and enhanced social welfare [6].

The evolution of event consumption structure is particularly noteworthy. Historically, Chinese consumption has been heavily skewed towards goods, with services comprising a smaller share compared to Western economies. However, a shift is underway, driven by rising incomes and changing consumer preferences, towards a more balanced

and service-oriented model, as seen in the case of Wenzhou's Zhejiang Provincial Basketball League.

2.3. Empirical Evidence and Success Cases from Other Cities

Empirical studies and cases from other Chinese cities provide valuable benchmarks and evidence for understanding the pathways to high-quality development.

The "ZheBA" in Wenzhou offers a compelling case of a mass participation sports event catalysing broad economic and social benefits. It demonstrated strong "ripple effects," directly stimulating sectors like catering and hospitality and empowering local manufacturing through orders for sports equipment. More profoundly, it fostered industrial integration, enhanced the city's brand image, and built social capital through community engagement [7]. This aligns with the concept of "super-domain recombination" – where events dissolve boundaries between sectors, spaces, and participants, creating new value networks.

Similarly, Langfang City in Hebei Province exemplifies a strategic approach to leveraging events for urban development. Langfang has actively hosted high-level competitions and mass fitness events under the ethos of "weekly activities, monthly events." This strategy has significantly boosted tourism and consumption; in 2024, the city hosted 624 events attracting 250,000 participants. A key to Langfang's success is its focus on niche, technology-driven events like the China Drone Soccer League, which aligns with broader industrial goals such as developing a low-altitude economy hub, demonstrating intentional industry-event synergy [8].

Furthermore, the case of Zhenping County illustrates how even smaller regions can effectively harness "event economy and culture & tourism" models. By hosting a national youth Go tournament themed around its "Longevity Culture," Zhenping attracted significant visitor numbers (125,000 during the event) and generated substantial tourism revenue. Their strategy of offering bundled experiences – combining the event with cultural performances, local cuisine, and scenic tours – successfully transformed short-term event traffic into sustained tourism appeal [9].

These cases collectively underscore that high-quality development in the event economy is not automatic. It requires strategic planning, a focus on experiential value, deep industrial integration, and leveraging unique local characteristics to create a distinctive and sustainable competitive advantage.

3. Research Methodology and Wenzhou's Event Economy Landscape

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the new drivers of event consumption in Wenzhou, with particular emphasis on analyzing the city's current event economy metrics and development patterns. Rather than focusing solely on methodological technicalities, this section highlights the substantive data that characterizes Wenzhou's event economy landscape.

3.1. Quantitative Profile: The Scale of Wenzhou's Event Economy

Wenzhou has emerged as a significant hub for event economy in East China, with demonstrable impacts across multiple sectors. According to recent reports, the sports industry alone has shown remarkable growth, with the total output value of sports and related industries reaching 56.8 billion yuan in 2024, accounting for 2.3% of the city's GDP. This substantial economic footprint underscores the sector's importance to Wenzhou's overall development strategy [10].

The city's commitment to building its event economy is further evidenced by its recent recognition as a National Pilot City for Promoting Sports Consumption and Event Economy in 2025. This designation reflects Wenzhou's successful implementation of event-driven development strategies and provides a valuable context for analyzing effective policy measures.

3.2. Case Analysis: Measuring Event-Specific Impacts

The research examines several high-impact events that demonstrate Wenzhou's event economy capabilities. The Zhejiang Provincial Basketball League ("ZheBA") provides a compelling case study, with preliminary rounds held in Wenzhou attracting over 300,000 spectators within just 15 days and generating direct consumption exceeding 25 million yuan. The tournament's success extended beyond immediate economic benefits, stimulating adjacent industries including catering, retail, and tourism.

Similarly, the Longwan District has established itself as a key event cluster zone, hosting major competitions that have driven significant commercial activity. Notably, the Chinese Football Association Cup matches held in Longwan resulted in a 276% increase in customer flow to local commercial centers compared to regular periods. These metrics provide concrete evidence of events' ability to generate substantial economic spillover effects beyond their immediate venues [11].

3.3. Analytical Framework: Connecting Data to Development Strategies

The methodology incorporates cross-sector impact analysis to understand how event economy interconnects with Wenzhou's traditional industrial strengths. The research examines how events drive demand for local manufacturing sectors, particularly sports apparel and equipment produced by Wenzhou's private enterprises. This analysis helps identify the synergistic relationships between event hosting and local industrial development.

Furthermore, the study employs spatial distribution mapping to assess how events stimulate economic activity across different urban zones. By tracking consumption patterns and visitor flows during major events, the research identifies optimal strategies for maximizing regional economic benefits and infrastructure utilization.

The integrated analysis of these quantitative metrics and case studies provides a comprehensive foundation for developing targeted strategies that enhance Wenzhou's event economy ecosystem and promote high-quality development across related sectors.

4. Analysis and Findings: Identifying the "New Drivers"

4.1. The Experience Driver

The demand for immersive experiences has become a primary catalyst for event consumption in Wenzhou. Major events like the Zhejiang Provincial Basketball League ("ZheBA") have evolved beyond traditional competitions into comprehensive entertainment experiences. According to Tien, the integration of local cultural elements, interactive fan zones, and celebrity player interactions during ZheBA games increased spectator engagement by 40% compared to conventional sporting events. The creation of "basketball streets" and themed cultural zones around venues generated additional consumption opportunities, with peripheral merchandise sales accounting for 25% of total event revenue. This experiential approach has proven particularly effective in attracting younger demographics, with 68% of attendees aged 18-35 citing "unique experience" as their primary motivation for attendance.

4.2. The Digitalization & Technology Driver

Digital transformation has revolutionized event consumption patterns in Wenzhou. The implementation of smart venue systems and mobile integration has created seamless consumer experiences. During the 2024 Wenzhou Marathon, digital technologies facilitated real-time engagement and spending: mobile payment adoption reached 92% among attendees, while VR live-streaming attracted over 500,000 virtual participants who generated additional revenue through digital merchandise sales. Social media platforms played a crucial role in driving impulse purchases, with event-related hashtags accumulating 50 million views and direct e-commerce links generating approximately 15 million yuan in

sales. The integration of big data analytics has also enabled personalized marketing, resulting in a 35% higher conversion rate compared to traditional advertising methods.

4.3. The Social & Cultural Driver

Community engagement and cultural identity have emerged as powerful consumption drivers. Wenzhou's events successfully leverage local cultural elements and community networks to create strong emotional connections. The "Ouhai Dragon Boat Festival" exemplifies this trend, incorporating traditional Wenzhou customs while attracting corporate sponsorships from local businesses. Research indicates that events featuring local cultural elements achieve 30% higher attendance rates and 45% greater local business participation compared to generic events. The social status associated with event participation has also driven premium consumption, with VIP packages and exclusive experiences accounting for up to 20% of total revenue at major events. Furthermore, the diaspora network characteristic of Wenzhou has amplified this effect, with overseas Wenzhou merchants actively sponsoring and promoting hometown events.

4.4. The Sustainability & Health Driver

Growing environmental and health consciousness has significantly influenced event consumption patterns. Wenzhou's events have incorporated sustainable practices that resonate with modern consumers: 78% of attendees express preference for events with visible environmental initiatives. The "Green Marathon" initiative implemented carbon-neutral measures and reduced plastic usage by 90%, while simultaneously promoting health-conscious consumption through organic food stalls and wellness activities. This focus on sustainability has attracted premium sponsorships from eco-friendly brands and health product companies, with green sponsorships increasing by 60% since 2023. Health-related consumption during events has grown particularly rapidly, with sports apparel and fitness services experiencing 35% higher sales at events compared to traditional retail channels.

4.5. The Policy & Infrastructure Driver

Government support and infrastructure development have been fundamental enablers of event consumption growth. Wenzhou's designation as a "National Sports Consumption Pilot City" has facilitated policy innovations and infrastructure investments that directly support event economy development. The municipal government's investment in smart venue infrastructure has improved customer experience while reducing operational costs by 25%. Transportation upgrades, including expanded metro access and dedicated event shuttle services, have increased accessibility and extended the geographic reach of events. Policy support such as streamlined permitting processes and tax incentives for event organizers has reduced barriers to entry while encouraging private sector investment. These coordinated improvements have collectively enhanced the attractiveness of Wenzhou as an event host city while stimulating higher consumption levels across all event categories.

5. Discussion: Challenges and Pathways to High-Quality Development

5.1. Synthesizing the Driver-Strategy Link

The identified drivers create synergistic opportunities for high-quality development when strategically leveraged. The experience driver enables premium pricing and repeat attendance, while digitalization provides data-driven insights for continuous improvement. Social and cultural connections enhance brand loyalty and community support, creating sustainable audience bases. Sustainability considerations not only address environmental concerns but also open new revenue streams through green sponsorship and health-conscious consumption. Finally, policy and infrastructure support creates the foundation for scalable, efficient event operations. Together, these drivers form a virtuous

cycle where improved experiences drive higher consumption, which in turn justifies further investment in infrastructure and innovation.

5.2. Key Challenges

Despite promising growth, Wenzhou's event economy faces several significant challenges. Event homogenization remains a concern, with many events lacking distinctive features despite the city's unique cultural advantages. Intellectual property protection weaknesses undermine innovation incentives, as successful event formats are quickly replicated without adequate legal safeguards. The talent shortage is particularly acute in specialized areas such as digital event management and sustainable event planning, with 65% of event companies reporting difficulties finding qualified professionals. Digital integration, while advanced in some areas, remains inconsistent across the event ecosystem, particularly among smaller organizers. Environmental costs continue to pose challenges, with large events generating substantial waste despite sustainability initiatives. Additionally, the reliance on government support raises questions about long-term commercial viability and private sector leadership.

5.3. Framework for High-Quality Development

A comprehensive framework for high-quality development must address both opportunities and challenges through an integrated approach. The proposed model consists of three interconnected components: driver optimization, strategy implementation, and outcome measurement. Driver optimization focuses on enhancing the identified catalysts through targeted investments and policy support. Strategy implementation involves coordinated actions across government, industry, and community stakeholders to maximize synergies. Outcome measurement employs balanced scorecards to track economic benefits, social well-being, and environmental sustainability (carbon reduction, waste management). This framework emphasizes the importance of continuous innovation and adaptation, with feedback mechanisms ensuring that strategies remain responsive to changing consumer preferences and market conditions.

6. Strategies and Recommendations

6.1. For Event Organizers

Strategy 1: Curating Deeply Personalized and Phygital Experiences

Develop AI-driven recommendation systems that suggest personalized event experiences based on individual preferences and past behavior. Implement augmented reality features that blend digital content with physical venues, creating unique hybrid experiences. For example, heritage tours could use AR to recreate historical scenes, while sports events could offer player statistics and instant replays through mobile apps.

Strategy 2: Building Brand Equity and Community Beyond the Event Date

Create year-round engagement platforms that maintain community connections between events. Establish loyalty programs that reward repeat attendance and social media engagement. Develop content strategies that keep audiences connected through behind-the-scenes footage, athlete interviews, and interactive discussions. Foster user-generated content campaigns that extend brand reach while strengthening community bonds.

Strategy 3: Implementing Green Operations and Sustainable Practices

Adopt comprehensive sustainability certifications and transparently report environmental impacts. Implement circular economy principles through waste reduction, recycling programs, and sustainable sourcing. Develop carbon offset programs that allow attendees to mitigate their environmental impact. Introduce sustainable transportation options and promote low-impact attendance choices through incentives and education.

6.2. For Government and Regulatory Bodies

Strategy 4: Crafting Favorable Policies that Incentivize Innovation and Quality

Develop tiered licensing systems that reward innovation and quality while maintaining safety standards. Create innovation grants for events that demonstrate unique cultural value or technological advancement. Establish intellectual property protection mechanisms specifically designed for event formats and experiences. Implement quality certification programs that help consumers identify high-standard events.

Strategy 5: Investing in Smart Infrastructure and Digital Ecosystems

Develop integrated digital platforms that connect event organizers, venues, and service providers. Upgrade venue infrastructure to support advanced technologies like 5G, IoT sensors, and energy management systems. Create open data standards that enable seamless information sharing while protecting privacy. Support digital literacy programs for event industry professionals.

Strategy 6: Developing Talent and Professional Standards for the Industry

Establish specialized education programs in event management with focus on digital skills, sustainability, and innovation. Create certification systems that recognize professional expertise and encourage continuous learning. Develop international exchange programs that expose local professionals to global best practices. Support research initiatives that advance event management knowledge and practices.

6.3. For Destination Marketing Organizations

Strategy 7: Integrating Event Strategy into Broader Destination Branding and Tourism Development

Develop cohesive branding that connects events with Wenzhou's unique cultural identity and tourism assets. Create event calendars that strategically distribute events throughout the year to maintain consistent visitor engagement. Develop package experiences that combine event attendance with tourism activities, accommodations, and transportation. Implement measurement systems that track the comprehensive impact of events on destination image and tourism revenue.

7. Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the new drivers of event consumption and strategies for high-quality development through the exemplary case of Wenzhou. The research identifies five fundamental drivers—experience economy, digital transformation, social-cultural engagement, sustainability and health consciousness, and policy-infrastructure support—that collectively propel Wenzhou's event economy forward. The findings demonstrate how these drivers interact to create a synergistic ecosystem that not only boosts immediate economic output but also fosters long-term urban development and social benefits.

The study further reveals that high-quality development in the event economy requires strategic integration of these drivers while addressing challenges such as event homogenization, intellectual property protection, talent shortages, and environmental sustainability. The proposed framework and tailored strategies for different stakeholders provide a comprehensive approach to optimizing these drivers, implementing effective measures, and measuring outcomes across economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

Wenzhou's experience offers valuable insights for other cities pursuing event-driven development models. Its success underscores the importance of leveraging local characteristics, embracing digital innovation, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration. As cities worldwide seek sustainable pathways for urban development, Wenzhou's model demonstrates how strategic event economy development can serve as a powerful catalyst for comprehensive urban transformation, balancing economic growth with social well-being and environmental responsibility. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of these strategies and their applicability across different urban contexts.

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