

An Analysis of the Impact of Community Tourism Experience on the City Brand Recognition of Chengdu: Taking Mengzhuibay Community as an Example

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Abstract. Despite the high popularity of tourism in Chengdu, there is a core issue of insufficient depth in tourists' experiences. The study taking the Mengzhuibay community as an example reveals that although it has successfully attracted a large number of visitors, its tourism experience faces several major challenges: short stay time, activities mostly limited to taking photos at popular spots, and a superficial experience; the essence of the local "vibrant" culture is distorted by social media tags; and the lack of digital technology leads to a scarcity of immersive experiences. Moreover, excessive commercialization has impacted traditional businesses and weakened residents' sense of belonging, while the absence of a systematic feedback mechanism hinders optimization. These problems not only limit tourists' deep understanding and emotional connection with the local culture but also restrict their deep recognition of Chengdu's diverse brand goals such as "Park City" and "World Sports City". To enhance Chengdu's brand recognition, the study suggests that relevant departments should deepen local cultural narratives, integrate intangible cultural heritage experiences to guide in-depth immersion, strengthen the application of digital technology, develop immersive interactive platforms, promote resident co-creation, and ensure cultural authenticity and community vitality. Ultimately, by enhancing the authenticity and depth of community tourism, the imbalance between "popularity and depth" can be resolved, supporting Chengdu in achieving an upgrade of its city brand centered on cultural identity.

Keywords: Community tourism, urban brand recognition, Mengzhuibay, cultural identity, digital empowerment

1. Introduction

In recent years, Chengdu has emerged as a popular tourist destination, attracting a large number of visitors with its iconic elements such as pandas, delicious food, and Taikoo Li. The overall tourism has been on the rise. However, a notable problem has also been exposed: many tourists merely visit the city for a cursory look and take photos, without delving deeply into its culture. This "symbol"

and "traffic" driven tourism model, while generating attention and revenue in the short term, fails to foster a deep understanding and emotional connection with the city's culture among tourists. In contrast, community tourism, being more closely aligned with local life, is seen as having the potential to make breakthroughs in cultural experiences. Take Mengzuiwan as an example. As one of the typical communities in Chengdu's urban renewal, it boasts rich industrial heritage, local culture, and intangible cultural resources. However, the current tourism experience in Mengzuiwan still mainly focuses on taking photos and checking in, with issues such as distorted cultural expression, insufficient interaction depth, and outdated technological means. These factors have affected tourists' comprehensive understanding of Chengdu's city brand and are not conducive to the city's efforts to build a deeper brand image such as "Park City" or "Smart City".

This study aims to analyze the current situation and problems of community tourism in Mengzuiwan and explore how community tourism experiences influence tourists' perception of the city brand. This not only helps people better understand the reasons behind the "high heat but shallow experience" phenomenon but also hopes to provide some feasible suggestions for Chengdu's future city brand building. From an academic perspective, this study attempts to connect the seemingly different themes of city brand and community tourism, emphasizing the role of tourists' real experiences in shaping the city's image. From a practical perspective, it also hopes to identify problems and propose improvement directions to make community tourism in Chengdu more culturally profound and humanized, thereby making it easier for tourists to leave lasting memories and emotional connections.

The study mainly focuses on the following aspects, first, the specific aspects in which the current tourism experience in Mengzuiwan community is lacking; second, whether these problems affect tourists' understanding and perception of Chengdu's city brand; finally, the possible ways to optimize the community tourism experience and enhance tourists' overall impression of the city.

The goal of this study is to investigate and analyze the current tourism situation in Mengzuiwan community, clarify the connection between tourism experience and city brand, identify key problems, and propose actionable suggestions to provide references for the further development of community tourism and the promotion of the city brand in Chengdu.

2. Overview of the current situation

Mengzhuibay, as a significant model of urban renewal in Chengdu's old industrial area, has successfully transformed from a traditional industrial zone into a new cultural, artistic, and tourism destination since the launch of its urban renewal project in 2018. The community has fully preserved its original industrial heritage, such as old factories, chimneys, and water towers, and organically integrated them with local street culture, creating a unique tourism environment with an industrial heritage aesthetic. Currently, Mengzhuibay is widely recognized as a landmark area for urban renewal and cultural regeneration in Chengdu. In terms of tourism resource types, Mengzhuibay belongs to urban cultural tourism resources, combining industrial heritage resources with intangible cultural heritage resources. Its core attractions include the preserved and renovated old industrial buildings, the display of Chengdu's street culture scenes, and various introduced intangible cultural heritage experience projects. For instance, the "Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop" regularly organizes interactive experiences such as Sichuan Opera face painting, sugar painting, and bamboo weaving, allowing visitors to participate in the making of traditional handicrafts. Additionally, the area has attracted a large number of creative brands, forming a new "immersive cultural consumption" model that integrates art exhibitions, handcraft experiences, and creative shopping. In terms of tourism experience forms, Mengzhuibay focuses on immersive, participatory, and

interactive experiences. Visitors can not only stroll through the streets where the old and the new blend, taking photos and checking in, but also participate in city walking (City Walk) routes, art flash mobs, and intangible cultural heritage skill experience courses. Moreover, Mengzhuibay is also a gathering place for popular restaurants, with many local well-known brands and theme coffee shops setting up shop here, forming an integrated leisure route of "eating, shopping, playing, and taking photos", which is very popular among young tourists. In terms of tourism management and promotion, Mengzhuibay has adopted several innovative measures. Firstly, in terms of management mechanisms, the "Mengzhuibay Urban Renewal Management Committee" has been established to uniformly plan and coordinate the operation of the street and investment attraction, promoting collaborative cooperation among cultural brands, social organizations, and the government. Secondly, in terms of digital communication, the community highly relies on social media platforms for tourism marketing. Among the tourists, the proportion of those aged 18-35 is as high as 72%, and over 70% of them obtain tourism information through platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Weibo [1]. Therefore, Mengzhuibay has collaborated with many local KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) and cultural tourism bloggers, attracting attention through the release of high-quality short videos, check-in guides, and Vlogs of intangible cultural heritage experiences. As of 2024, the number of notes related to "Mengzhuibay" on Xiaohongshu has exceeded 80,000, and topics such as "Chengdu City Walk Recommendations" and "Industrial Style Check-in Landmarks" have continuously ranked on the hot list, enhancing the destination's social media popularity and visibility. In terms of reception capacity, the number of tourists received by Mengzhuibay has been continuously increasing. Since being listed as a "Chengdu Community Tourism Demonstration Point", its annual average growth rate of tourists has reached 35%. In 2023, it received over 2.3 million tourists throughout the year, and there were often gatherings of tourists during holidays and weekends, making it a popular destination for short-term leisure and check-ins for both local residents and tourists from other places. The area has achieved initial success in the integrated development of culture and tourism, driving the development of surrounding businesses and employment, and becoming a successful model of "organic renewal" and "community cultural and tourism integration" in Chengdu. In summary, through the revitalization and utilization of industrial heritage, the in-depth exploration of street culture, the design of diverse tourism experiences, and precise marketing driven by new media, Mengzhuibay has initially formed a unique urban cultural tourism community. In the future, with the continuous advancement of cultural and tourism integration policies and the diversification of tourists' experience demands, Mengzhuibay is expected to further expand its cultural and tourism boundaries and become a model of urban renewal and tourism innovation in China.

3. Existing problems and multidimensional challenges

Under the backdrop of the continuous rise in the overall tourism popularity of Chengdu, the tourism in the Mengzhuibay community has indeed brought a lot of traffic and exposure. However, the problems that Mengzhuibay is currently facing are not merely the superficial issue of "insufficiently rich experiences", but rather, almost every aspect from digital communication, experience design, technological empowerment, community co-construction to feedback mechanisms needs improvement. If these problems are not addressed, it will be difficult for community tourism to truly play a long-term supporting role for the city brand of Chengdu, and it will also be difficult for tourists to establish a stable emotional connection.

3.1. Digital communication issues: leading to fragmented cognition

In terms of tourism management and promotion, Mengzhuibay has adopted several innovative measures. Firstly, in terms of management mechanisms, the "Mengzhuibay Urban Renewal Management Committee" was established to coordinate the operation of the street and investment attraction, promoting cooperation among cultural brands, social organizations, and the government. Secondly, in terms of promotion, the community highly relies on digital communication, especially social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Weibo. Among the tourists, the proportion of the 18-35 age group is as high as 72%, and over 70% of them obtain information through social platforms [1]. In 2024, there were over 80,000 notes related to "Mengzhuibay" on Xiaohongshu, and multiple check-in topics such as "Chengdu City Walk Recommendations" and "Industrial Style Check-in Landmarks" frequently topped the hot list, bringing a continuous flow of people to Mengzhuibay. However, this communication model, which mainly relies on short videos and photo check-ins, also brings certain drawbacks. Tourists often remain at the level of visual stimulation and lack in-depth experiences. Data shows that the average stay time of tourists in Mengzhuibay is only 1.5 hours, reflecting that most people "take a look and leave", lacking emotional accumulation and cultural memory. Even worse, many social contents label it as "Little Seoul", and although such external labels help to create a trendy image, they may weaken the authentic expression of local culture's "vitality" and "slow life". Research shows that if UGC lacks depth and authenticity, it may instead cause brand impression deviations or misinterpretations [2,3].

3.2. Lack of experience design: insufficient educational and cultural depth

Mengzhuibay currently offers a relatively rich variety of tourism experiences, emphasizing participation and immersion, such as intangible cultural heritage workshops, street flash mobs, and cultural and creative markets, which have attracted a large number of young users to check-in and interact. However, from the perspective of the four elements of tourism experience theory - entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics - the current experiences in Mengzhuibay are more inclined towards aesthetics and entertainment, lacking in-depth educational communication [4]. For instance, although the intangible cultural heritage workshops have set up experience sections, they lack systematic explanations, resulting in tourists "forgetting after playing", making it difficult to establish a deep cultural understanding [5]. This also limits its value output in the overall city brand building of Chengdu. In terms of reception capacity, the annual growth rate of tourists in Mengzhuibay has reached 35%, with over 2.3 million total visits in 2023, and the density of tourists during holidays has significantly increased. However, for sustainable development, relying solely on "visual economy" is far from enough. In the future, Mengzhuibay should strengthen content planning, focus on the combination of cultural inheritance and education, and guide social platform content to shift from superficiality to depth, thereby forming a more memorable urban tourism brand experience.

3.3. Lagging technological empowerment: absence of immersive experiences and insufficient interactivity

Mengzhuibay has obvious deficiencies in using digital technology to enrich tourism experiences. The core issue lies in the fact that the application of technology has not effectively served the deepening of experiences and brand storytelling. The root cause is the insufficient investment in advanced means such as AR navigation, VR scene recreation, and interactive online platforms,

resulting in single and weakly interactive digital content [6,7]. The absence of technological empowerment has had significant negative impacts: the tourist experience is confined to a superficial sensory stimulation level of "just looking", failing to form multi-sensory immersion and deep interactive memories [8,9]. This not only weakens the narrative depth and emotional resonance that technology should bring, but also hinders tourists' recognition and identification with Chengdu's brand dimensions such as "Smart City" and "Innovative City".

3.4. Community ecological impact: excessive commercialization undermines cultural authenticity and resident belonging

One of the core challenges faced by Mengchuiwan is the imbalance in commercial development, which essentially lies in the erosion of local cultural roots and community subjectivity by excessive commercialization. The problem mainly stems from the large-scale introduction of homogenized internet-famous chain stores to cater to young consumers, squeezing out traditional small shops and old tea houses that carry the local "flavor of life". This shift in business model has brought about dual negative impacts: on the one hand, the spirit of place (local uniqueness) is diluted by commercial homogenization, and cultural authenticity is severely damaged [10]. On the other hand, the sense of participation, belonging, and cultural identity of residents, who are the core carriers and co-builders of local culture, is weakened, and they may even feel alienated by the "invasion of foreign consumer culture", seriously damaging brand sustainability and the community's internal driving force [11].

3.5. Absence of feedback mechanism: unreleased value of tourist experience data constrains continuous optimization

A key shortcoming in the operation of Mengchuiwan is the lack of a systematic mechanism for collecting, analyzing, and utilizing tourist feedback data. The essence of the problem lies in the failure to establish an effective data-driven decision-making process. The root cause is that although tourists share their experiences extensively on social media (such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Dianping), the operation side has not established a unified system for data collection, sentiment analysis, and theme mining. The absence of this systematic data feedback has serious negative impacts: the operation side cannot timely and accurately grasp tourists' real experiences, pain points, and changing demands, leading to lagging optimization measures and difficulty in addressing the aforementioned issues (such as superficial experiences and cultural distortion) in a targeted manner [12]. More critically, if negative experiences are not promptly detected and addressed through effective data monitoring, they can be rapidly amplified and spread through UGC, damaging brand reputation and ultimately missing the key opportunity to enhance the depth of experience and strengthen brand recognition based on data-driven approaches.

4. Suggestions

Based on the above conclusions, to enhance the depth of tourism experience in Mengchuiwan Community and strengthen its positive impact on Chengdu's urban brand perception, this study proposes the following core suggestions. First, the integration of local cultural narrative and experience should be deepened: go beyond symbolic display and deeply integrate Chengdu's unique 'vibrancy' street culture and intangible cultural heritage resources into tourism product design. Themed and story-driven cultural experience routes should be developed, combined with in-depth

interactive activities (such as lacquerware making experience) at intangible cultural heritage workshops, tea houses with cultural salons, and community story museums, enabling tourists to be guided to shift from 'check in' to 'immersion'. This facilitates their participation in interactive and educational activities to understand the essence of local culture, establishing a genuine emotional attachment, thereby strengthening the deep cognitive connection with Chengdu's cultural brand core.

Second, the empowerment of digital technology should be strengthened for immersive experiences: the deployment of AR/VR and digital twin technologies should be accelerated. An AR guided tour application should be developed based on the industrial history and daily life of Mengzhuibay, recreating historical scenes; a VR experience center should be constructed to provide immersive experiences of Chengdu culture (such as Sichuan Opera and tea culture); an online-offline interactive community culture platform should be created to encourage tourists to produce and share in-depth cultural experience content. Through technological means, multi-sensory and highly interactive immersive experiences should be created, enriching tourists' perceptual dimensions and effectively conveying Chengdu's 'smart' and 'innovative' urban brand image.

Finally, residents should be promoted to jointly create to ensure the authenticity of culture and the vitality of the community: an effective mechanism for resident participation and shared benefits should be established. Local residents (especially old shopkeepers and artisans) should be encouraged and supported to become cultural guides and experience mentors; space in business planning should be reserved to support traditional old stores, special snacks, and other original businesses; cultural markets and community activities should be organized to facilitate interaction between residents and tourists. It should be ensured that residents are not only the objects of cultural display but also the main body of cultural inheritance and partners in brand co-construction, thereby maintaining cultural authenticity, enhancing residents' sense of belonging, stimulating the community's internal cultural vitality, and providing sustainable and vibrant support for the city brand.

5. Conclusion

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of the tourism experience in Mengzhuibay Community, revealing the profound challenges it faces as an important showcase window of Chengdu's urban brand and its constraining effect on brand perception. The research found that although Mengzhuibay achieved initial traffic aggregation through urban renewal and became an important contributor to Chengdu's tourism popularity, its tourism experience exhibited significant superficial characteristics, characterized by short visitor stay times (averaging 1.5 hours) and a high concentration of activities at popular Check-in spots, lacking in-depth interaction and understanding of local culture. This superficial experience model is unable to form a deep cognitive connection with Chengdu's urban cultural core and a lasting emotional bond. More critically, social media dissemination has amplified the community's popularity while also causing distortion in the narrative of Chengdu's urban brand.

Popular tags such as "Little Seoul" attracted specific audiences in the short term, but gradually drifted away from Chengdu's core culture of "vibrancy" and "slow life", blurring the city's unique brand identity. The lag in technology empowerment has further exacerbated the issue of insufficient experience depth. The absence of AR/VR and other immersive interactive technologies has kept tourists' experiences at the surface level of sensory stimulation, failing to effectively build multi-dimensional and immersive brand touchpoints, hindering the transmission and recognition of modern brand images such as "Smart City" and "Innovation City" of Chengdu.

The study also discovered that in the rapid tourism process of Mengzhuibay, the excessive commercialization tendency has had a profound impact on the community ecology. The influx of homogenized businesses has squeezed traditional business forms that carry local cultural genes, diluting the sense of place and damaging cultural authenticity. At the same time, the role of local residents as living carriers of local culture and brand co-builders has been marginalized, weakening their sense of belonging and cultural identity, even causing a sense of alienation. This not only weakens the community's inherent cultural vitality but also undermines the foundation for the sustainable development of the city's brand. Moreover, the absence of a systematic data feedback mechanism for tourist experiences has prevented the operators from accurately grasping changes in tourist needs and pain points, unable to promptly respond and optimize issues such as superficial experiences and cultural distortion, missing the opportunity window for continuous improvement of experience quality and brand recognition based on data-driven approaches.

In conclusion, the current development model of community tourism in Mengzhuibay faces significant bottlenecks in terms of experience depth, authenticity of cultural narrative, technology application, balance of community ecology, and data-driven optimization. These issues interweave and jointly lead to tourists' perception of Chengdu's urban brand remaining at the symbolic and fragmented superficial level, unable to form a deep cultural understanding and value recognition, thereby severely restricting Chengdu's realization of its diverse and three-dimensional brand vision of "Park City", "World Sports City", "Smart City", and "Innovation City". Solving the structural contradiction of "imbalance between tourism popularity and experience depth" has become the key to upgrading Chengdu's brand perception.

Authors contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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