

# Research on the Marketing Models of Cultural and Tourism Variety Shows in the Context of "The Belt and Road": Taking Divas Hit the Road S5 as an Example

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**Abstract:** The "Belt and Road Initiative" connects multiple cultural issues and is one of the directions for variety shows to conduct marketing. *Divas Hit the Road S5* has reshaped the classic IP by combining with this issue and has become a hit variety show in 2023. This research adopts a mixed research method. Through the questionnaire survey of 120 viewers and the comparative analysis of previous variety shows, it explores the integration path between the marketing model of *Divas Hit the Road S5* and the cultural issues of the "Belt and Road Initiative" under the guidance of the art world theory and the field theory. The research results show that through innovations in three aspects, namely content, narrative and dissemination, combined with capital operation, the integration of the marketing model of cultural tourism variety shows and cultural issues can be achieved. This is not only of referential significance for similar variety shows, but also helps to build a theoretical model for the development of the industry, facilitating the variety show industry to find a new balance point in innovative marketing models and cultural dissemination.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the phenomenon that under the background of the integration of culture and tourism, *Divas Hit the Road S5* has innovated its marketing model by combining with the "Belt and Road Initiative" and has become a hit variety show product in 2023 (Wang, 2024). It mainly unfolds specifically from two aspects: the viewing needs of the audience of *Divas Hit the Road S5* and the integration path of the program with the "Belt and Road Initiative". Using the questionnaire survey method and literature analysis method, combined with the art world theory and the field theory, this paper analyzes how the cultural issues of the "Belt and Road Initiative" influence the marketing model of *Divas Hit the Road S5*. This research is of great significance for cultural tourism variety shows to explore the communication potential of cultural issues, achieve creative transformation by integrating audience needs, and innovate marketing models. The objective of this research is to explore how *Divas Hit the Road S5* innovates its marketing model in combination with the "Belt and Road Initiative", and to summarize the theoretical model of the integration

of the marketing model of cultural tourism variety shows and cultural issues.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on cultural tourism variety shows has presented a multi - dimensional trend. On the one hand, some studies focus on the analysis of the narrative characteristics of programs from a cross-cultural perspective. For example, in *The Value Guidance and Identity Construction of Divas Hit the Road S5*, Shilin Zhao analyzed the construction of characters and plots in the program and summarized the narrative methods of the program (Zhao, 2024). In *Emotional Expressions and Cultural Exchanges in Domestic Reality Shows: Taking Divas Hit the Road S5 as an Example*, Linling He reveals the narrative characteristics of travel reality shows and analyzes the emotional experiences and cultural exchanges of the guests in different settings (He, 2024). In *Analysis of the Narrative Characteristics of Cultural and Tourism Variety Shows on the Belt and Road Theme: Taking Divas Hit the Road S5 as an Example*, Yarui Luo studied the program's people-friendly and micro-

narrative expressions from a humanistic perspective, providing a reference sample for the model innovation of cultural and tourism variety shows (Luo, 2024). On the other hand, some research delves into the attraction of content innovation to the audience. For example, in *Analysis of the Breakthrough Path of Cultural and Tourism Variety Shows in the Context of Cross-cultural Communication: Taking Divas Hit the Road S5 as an Example*, Yeqing Tan explores its innovative methods from aspects such as value orientation, content construction, and communication strategies (Tan, 2024). In *Research on the Innovation Strategies of Slow-paced Travel Variety Shows: Taking Divas Hit the Road S5 as an Example*, Zhen Li, Wen Wang, and Youran Ma analyzed the strategies of the program in terms of arrangement, promotion, and audience interaction (Li et al., 2024). In *Strategies for Cross-cultural Empathetic Communication in Variety Shows: Taking Divas Hit the Road S5 as an Example*, Xihe Li attempts to analyze how the program structure and the interaction patterns among guests influence the innovation of the program content (Li, 2024). Some documents utilize theories related to the cultural industry to analyze the marketing models of the programs. For example, in *Research on the Communication Strategies of Divas Hit the Road S5 in Promoting China's Image from the Perspective of Peripheral Communication*, Yijue Wang and Xueli Deng explore the specific strategies of the program in the communication of national image through the communication characteristics of temporal periphery, relational periphery, and spatial periphery in the peripheral communication theory (Wang & Deng, 2024).

Despite the remarkable achievements of previous research, few studies have explored the practical approaches to the integrated communication of the marketing models of cultural tourism variety shows and cultural issues. This paper will start with the investigation of audience needs, collecting first-hand data such as the emotional and aesthetic needs of the audience when watching programs. Guided by the art world theory and the field theory, it will conduct research on the integrated communication of the marketing models of cultural tourism variety shows and cultural issues, filling the gaps in the existing literature.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.1 Questionnaire Survey

This study comprehensively applies the mixed-research method. The questionnaire-survey method is adopted, and questionnaires are distributed to 120 audiences aged 19-30 from different regions. This provides the most direct audience perspective for this research. Through coding analysis, the categories of emotional and aesthetic needs of the audience when watching this program can be summarized. The literature analysis method is adopted to systematically review the research findings of past literature, providing diverse materials and comparative references for this study.

#### 3.2 Questionnaire Survey

##### 3.2.1 The Emotional Needs of the Audience

Through the coding analysis of the survey data, the categories of emotional needs of the audience when watching travel variety shows can be divided into three types: self-relief needs (stress reduction and relaxation, leisure and entertainment), social needs (acquiring social conversation topics, filling social gaps), and knowledge-seeking needs (awareness of foreign cultures, topic attention). The data shows that 55% of the respondents expressed they are tired of the daily tedious work, academic burden, and monotonous living environment. The following is a typical comment from Respondent A, 27-year-old: "Every day, I'm busy facing the computer in the office building, getting totally confused. Life seems like a stagnant pool. When I turn on *Divas Hit the Road S5*, seeing the travel snapshots of the seven of them in the countries along the Belt and Road, it's as if I'm suddenly pulled out of the quagmire of reality. I feel like I'm traveling with them, and it's really stress-relieving."

At the same time, social needs play a crucial role among the emotional needs of the audience. On the one hand, the rich content covered by travel variety shows can easily be transformed into popular conversation topics in social settings. Respondent B, who is 20 years old, mentioned, "At the last friend gathering, we talked about the scene of watching the stars in the program. Everyone started discussing animatedly, and the atmosphere was really great. I feel that this program has given us a common topic and brought us closer."; On the other hand, the busyness of real-life prevents some viewers from having their real-world social needs met. However,

the atmosphere of ensemble-cast variety shows can fill this gap in the viewers' social needs. This is in line with the need for social capital accumulation in the "cultural capital" theory. Audiences obtain social topics through variety shows, thereby expanding their social networks and achieving the accumulation of social capital; At the same time, the group sense of belonging brought to the audience by the interactions among guests in the program can also enhance the social connections and emotional bonds of the audience, thus strengthening social capital (Zhou, 2023).

In addition, some viewers also expressed their expectation to understand the cultures of the countries along the Belt and Road through the program, so as to broaden their cultural horizons. Respondent C said, "Previously, my understanding of Central Asian countries was rather vague. *Divas Hit the Road S5* is like a key that has opened the door to my understanding of the world's diverse cultures." *Divas Hit the Road S5* integrates cultural heritage into the program, providing a way for the audience to accumulate cultural capital such as knowledge, literacy, and aesthetic taste.

### 3.2.2 The Aesthetic Needs of the Audience

Compared with previous cultural tourism variety shows, most of the early ones took conflict-filled dramatic plots as marketing keystone. The guests mostly participated in an experiential way, simply enjoying the beautiful scenery and tasting the cuisine of different places. In recent years, slow-paced variety shows such as *Back to Field* and *Land Camp* have become increasingly popular. Audience aesthetic preferences tend to lean towards cultural tourism variety shows that feature a return to nature, a touch of everyday life, and a relatively high level of self-involvement. Through the coding analysis of the survey results, this study divides the aesthetic needs of the audience when watching cultural and tourism variety shows into content aesthetics (cultural elements, plot settings) and form aesthetics (program presentation forms, topic dissemination). Over 80% of the respondents value the exploration of cultural elements in cultural and tourism variety shows. Against the backdrop of the improvement of the national cultural literacy, audiences' viewing of cultural and tourism variety shows is not merely confined to the tourist scenery presented in the programs. Instead, they are more inclined to experience the cultural heritage, humanities and history of the tourist destinations. 65% of the respondents said that they no longer favor the

dramatic plot among guests when watching cultural and tourism variety shows. Instead, they have a greater preference for the content style with plain narration. 50% of the respondents believe that if cultural and tourism variety shows can innovate in their forms of expression, it can enhance their sense of participation.

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Influence Path of "The Belt and Road" Cultural Topics on the Program's Marketing Model

According to the art world theory, the collective creative characteristics of *Divas Hit the Road S5* are mainly manifested through the following creative entities: in the pre-planning stage of the program, including the program planning team, local cultural and tourism departments, and sponsors; in the mid-production stage, including the program shooting and post-production team, and guests; in the post-promotion and distribution stage, including the audience and the promotion and distribution platforms. Moreover, the cultural issues of the Belt and Road have an impact on these entities.

In the pre-planning stage of the program, the cultural topics of the Belt and Road provide the program planning team with the basis for theme selection and concept determination. The team closely adhered to the backdrop of the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, enabling the program to return with the theme of the "New Silk Road," thus endowing it with high social significance. At the same time, the planning team adopted an "educational travel mode" different from regular tourism. They selected three countries, Saudi Arabia, Croatia, and Iceland, which are highly representative both in the history of the Belt and Road and in terms of natural scenery. "Compulsory courses" and "elective courses" were set up to allow the guests to deeply learn about and experience the local cultures. At a time when the spiritual world of the audience is filled with formulaic carnival and entertainment, the addition of cultural elements also caters to the emotional needs of the audience mentioned in the research findings. In addition, the program planning team has also made differences in narrative compared with previous variety shows. Looking back on the narrative of previous programs, whenever grand cultural topics were involved, whether it was for domestic narrative or external communication, a grand narrative

approach was adopted. Such an official narrative method often seemed dull, lacking the flavor of daily life, and making it difficult for the audience to empathize. Under this industry convention, the program planning team innovated the narrative approach. They used the "small" perspectives of the guests during their travels to showcase the glorious achievements of the Belt and Road. While narrowing the distance with the audience, this approach presented grand issues through everyday details, disassembling grand topics with a touch of daily life, thus catering to the aesthetic needs of the audience (Zhang, 2024). The support of local cultural and tourism departments is a necessary factor for the successful planning of the program. They have made significant contributions in terms of exploring and integrating cultural resources as well as promoting the program. For example, there was the traditional Croatian sailing boat banquet, and the Saudi Arabian Tourism Bureau recommended the program on Weibo on the eve of its premiere. It is worth noting that *Divas Hit the Road S5* has also received considerable sponsorship support. This is because the cultural topics of the Belt and Road endow the program with unique cultural value and social influence. Sponsors believe that the communication power and topicality of this topic can help the brand enhance its popularity and reputation, expand market share, and obtain more business opportunities. At the same time, by providing financial support and the like, sponsors can form a multi-party cooperation model with the program creation team and the cultural and tourism departments of countries along the Belt and Road, achieving mutual benefit and win-win results.

During the mid-production stage of the program, under the guidance of the cultural topics of the Belt and Road, the filming team pays more attention to showcasing the cultural landscapes and co-construction achievements of the countries along the Belt and Road, such as iconic projects like the Haramain High-Speed Railway in Saudi Arabia and the Pelješac Bridge in Croatia. The music selected by the post-production team for the program also became popular on social media platforms after the program was broadcast. These pieces of music not only match the emotional expressions of the guests but also showcase the characteristics of local cultural landscapes, which is a major highlight of the program. In addition, the creation of the guest personas in *Divas Hit the Road S5* is also worth noting. From the perspective of the art world theory, guests in the program are equivalent to a kind of "art medium". Under the influence of the cultural topics of the Belt and Road, the personas of the guests are no longer

confined to simple entertainment images, but are endowed with the role of cultural communicators. For example, guests can showcase traditional Chinese culture in the program through talent shows. They can also disseminate the cultures of other countries by learning local languages and understanding local customs. At the same time, the interactions among the guests create a healing variety-show atmosphere, which is in line with the spirit of friendly cooperation advocated by the cultural topics of the Belt and Road. The seven guests have distinct personalities. Their individual characteristics collide and blend with each other during the journey, weaving a rich emotional tapestry for the program. The guests' mutual tolerance and companionship in a foreign land serve as a grand "healing session" for the audience. While filling the void of social interaction, the audience can also experience the power of friendship (Wang, 2024).

In the post-promotion and distribution stage of the program, the cultural topics of the Belt and Road endow the program with a deeper cultural value compared with previous ones. As a result, the audience is more likely to develop a cultural identity with *Divas Hit the Road S5*. This cultural identity encourages the audience to participate more actively in the secondary creation of the program, thus forming a combined force for cultural dissemination. From the perspective of the art world theory, the broadcasting platform plays a crucial role in the dissemination of artworks. Under the influence of the cultural topics of the Belt and Road, Mango TV highlights the cultural exchange elements of the Belt and Road in its promotional copywriting and poster production. Lemon8 launched the "Travel Book Recommended by *Divas Hit the Road S5*". This is a model of cooperation among the program production team, the promotion platform, and the cultural and tourism departments. It not only sparks discussions about the program and increases its exposure, but also boosts the local tourism industry. It is worth mentioning that after the broadcast of *Divas Hit the Road S5*, it was liked and posted by the diplomatic departments of many countries. This undoubtedly proves the success of the innovative marketing model that integrates cultural topics in cultural and tourism variety shows.

#### 4.2 The Integration Paths of the Program Marketing Model and the Cultural Topics of "The Belt and Road"

According to the field theory, *Divas Hit the Road S5* holds advantages in cultural capital, audience attention capital, and social recognition capital within

the field of Chinese cultural and tourism variety shows, occupying a unique and crucial position. First of all, the integration of this variety show with cultural topics gives it an advantage in cultural capital. At a time when cultural and tourism variety shows generally focus on leisure and entertainment, *Divas Hit the Road S5* precisely targets the grand backdrop of the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, shaping the program into a window for cultural exchange and display. It not only showcases the folk cultures and construction achievements of the countries along the Belt and Road, but also presents a calling card of Chinese culture to the world. *Divas Hit the Road S5* carries a cultural information volume far exceeding that of ordinary travel variety shows, thus accumulating substantial cultural capital. Secondly, the casting of guests in *Divas Hit the Road S5* has accumulated a large amount of audience attention capital for the program. The seven guests already have a huge fan base of their own. Moreover, they have a "semi-acquainted" relationship with each other, creating a scenario among familiar faces that the audience loves to watch. The program sets the label of "Seven Travelers Guided by the Big Dipper" for them. During the study-tour under the theme of the Belt and Road, the diverse personalities of the seven guests not only create a hilarious and heart-warming variety-show effect but also generate numerous catchy topics, thus accumulating a great deal of audience attention for the program. In addition, compared with other variety shows, this program has also gained social recognition capital. After the program was broadcast, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave it a thumbs - up, the official Weibo accounts of Chinese embassies abroad recommended it. Xinhua News Agency and China Daily affirmed the cultural value and production standard of the program. The topics on social media remained highly popular, leading to favorable word-of-mouth dissemination. The recognition from all sectors of society has been transformed into intangible capital for the program.

In order to stand out in the field of cultural production, *Divas Hit the Road S5* inevitably has to compete with other travel variety shows. Apart from the three competitive advantages mentioned above, the broadcasting platform of this program is also one of its strengths. *Divas Hit the Road S5* is backed by Hunan Satellite TV and Mango TV, which endows it with high funding and extensive dissemination channels. Compared with some travel variety shows self-produced by online platforms, it is more competitive in obtaining celebrity resources and can invite many popular stars. This is where the celebrity

capital of *Divas Hit the Road S5* comes from. In addition, *Divas Hit the Road S5* adopts the format of "record+live" in its program presentation. This is in line with the characteristic of Mango TV having a young audience, and undoubtedly accumulates audience attention capital for the program. Prior to this, the presentation format of cultural and tourism variety shows was nothing more than recording first and then broadcasting. There was a disconnection in audience interaction, which led to a short lifespan of the variety shows and an inability to extend the program's influence chain. *Divas Hit the Road S5* adopts the innovative format of "record+live". In collaboration with Xinhua News Agency, it launched the "Walking with Light" aurora live-streaming event. Audiences and guests watched the same starry sky together, greatly enhancing the audience's sense of participation and experience.

Backed by multiple advantages in cultural capital, audience attention capital, social recognition capital, platform capital, and celebrity capital, *Divas Hit the Road S5* has achieved the integration of its marketing model with cultural topics.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In the context of a sluggish variety show landscape, *Divas Hit the Road S5* has achieved remarkable results. By integrating its marketing model with the cultural theme of the Belt and Road Initiative, it accurately positions its theme based on precisely meeting the audience's needs. It creates heart-warming study-tour content, interprets macro-level issues from a micro-perspective, and innovates in program promotion and distribution. Thus, through innovation at the three levels of content, narrative, and dissemination, combined with capital operation, it is possible to achieve the integration of the marketing model of cultural and tourism variety shows with cultural topics. This research has reference significance for academic research and industry practices within the field, it mainly influenced the application and practice of art theory and field theory in the marketing models of cultural and tourism variety shows, as well as the industry practice of integrating cultural topics with the innovation of variety show marketing models. Future research can broaden the scope of sample collection, deepen interdisciplinary theoretical research, establish a dynamic tracking mechanism, make up for limitations, and develop a more elaborate theoretical model.

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