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Exploring the Pathways for Internationalization of Marketing Programs in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Background of Hainan Free Trade Port Construction

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Abstract:
The rapid advancement of Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) construction has not only fueled the growth of Hainan's three leading industries—tourism, modern services, and high-tech industries—but has also elevated the province's level of openness to the world. As Hainan faces an expanding international market, the demand for marketing talent is evolving towards higher quality and increased internationalization. In response to the new developments and demands brought about by the FTP, higher vocational colleges, as critical bases for cultivating applied talent, must strategically adjust their program directions to train international marketing professionals urgently needed for the FTP. This paper reviews the current development of marketing programs in Hainan's higher vocational colleges, analyzes the opportunities and challenges posed by the FTP construction, and explores pathways for the internationalization of marketing programs that align with FTP requirements and embody the unique characteristics of Hainan.

Keywords:
Higher vocational education; Marketing; Internationalization; Hainan Free Trade Port

1 Introduction

Hainan Province serves as a crucial gateway for China's opening to the Pacific and Indian Oceans and holds strategic importance in the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road." Its unique geographical position and resource endowment have established Hainan as not only China's largest special economic zone but also a prime location for testing the highest level of open policies. The 14th Five-Year Plan for Hainan emphasizes accelerating the development of three key industries: tourism, modern services, and high-tech industries. This plan aims to enhance these industries' attractiveness to foreign investment and to establish a distinctive Free Trade Port with Hainan characteristics. As a barometer for Hainan's future development, this plan demands that these key industries not only strengthen their capabilities but also gradually align with international standards, creating a powerful global brand for Hainan. Moreover, in the process of expanding openness to the outside world, there is a heightened expectation for Hainan to improve its infrastructure and service capabilities for foreign investment.

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Against this backdrop, the internationalization of marketing programs in Hainan's higher vocational colleges holds significant practical relevance and promising prospects. On one hand, the rapid development of the tourism, services, and high-tech industries requires the support of high-quality talent. In particular, skilled marketing professionals are needed to fully understand market dynamics and effectively use new technologies and methods to transform Hainan's unique natural and cultural resources into well-known brands. On the other hand, fostering a high-level, outward-oriented economy and attracting foreign investment to Hainan necessitates the enhancement of supporting industries like business services. The development of these industries is intrinsically linked to the availability of high-end marketing professionals with an international perspective. Therefore, Hainan's higher vocational colleges should leverage their role as incubators of applied talent by timely adjusting the development pathways of their marketing programs. This approach will cultivate a group of internationally minded marketing professionals with solid skills and a global outlook, better serving the construction of Hainan's Free Trade Port.

2 Current Development of Marketing Programs in Hainan's Higher Vocational Colleges

As a critical discipline within the broader category of business administration, the marketing program is characterized by its low technical entry barriers and wide-ranging employment opportunities. This has made it a popular choice among higher vocational colleges. By 2023, more than 1,000 higher vocational colleges across China had established marketing programs, enrolling approximately 100,000 students annually. Among Hainan Province's 13 higher vocational colleges, most have established marketing programs within their various schools, except for more specialized institutions such as Hainan Vocational College of Politics and Law, Hainan Sports Vocational and Technical College, and Hainan Vocational College of Health. The specific details of these program offerings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of Marketing Programs in Higher Vocational Colleges in Hainan Province

School Name	Type	College/ Department	Program Name	Core Courses
Hainan Vocational and Technical College	Public	School of Economics and Management	Marketing	Practical Marketing, Market Research and Analysis, Business Negotiation and Sales Techniques, Marketing Planning, Retail Management, Business Data Analysis, E-Marketing (New Media Application), Marketing Simulation, Comprehensive Professional Practice
Hainan Software Vocational and Technical College	Public	School of Economics and Management	Marketing	Fundamentals of Economics, Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Market Research and Forecasting, Marketing Planning, E-Marketing, New Media Operations and Promotion
Hainan College of Economics and Business	Public	School of International Tourism	Marketing	Fundamentals of Marketing, Consumer Psychology and Behavior, Market Research and Analysis, New Media Marketing, Duty-Free Marketing, E-Commerce Data Analysis, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Simulation, Cross-Border Marketing, Live Streaming Marketing, Short Video Marketing

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Sanya City College	Private	Department of Finance and Cultural Tourism	Marketing	Principles and Practices of Marketing, Consumer Psychology, Introduction to New Media, Marketing Planning, Copywriting, Customer Management and Service, Advertising Planning and Marketing, Comprehensive Marketing Practice, Short Video Production and Editing, E-Commerce, Live Streaming Operations
Hainan Vocational College of Business and Industry	Private	School of Economics and Management	Marketing	Management, Economics, Advertising, Consumer Psychology, Marketing, Market Research and Forecasting, Marketing Planning and Copywriting, New Media Marketing, Digital Marketing, Enterprise Management, Sales Techniques, Marketing Planning Practice, New Media Marketing Technology Practice, Digital Marketing Technology Practice
Sanya Aviation and Tourism College	Private	School of International Tourism	Marketing (Luxury Goods Marketing and Management)	Overview of Global Luxury Goods, Luxury Brand Management, Consumer Psychology and Behavior, Luxury Goods Marketing, Window Display Design, Luxury Goods Appreciation, Maintenance and Care of Luxury Goods, Jewelry and Gemstone Identification
Sanya Polytechnic College	Private	School of Economics and Trade	Marketing	Introduction to Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Business Etiquette, Fundamentals of Management, Public Speaking, Practical New Media Marketing, Market Research, Service Marketing, Marketing Planning, New Retail Practices, Business Negotiation and Communication, Customer Relationship Management, Channel Management, Sales Techniques
			Marketing (3+2)	Introduction to Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Business Etiquette, Fundamentals of Management, Public Speaking, Practical New Media Marketing, Market Research, Service Marketing, Marketing Planning, New Retail Practices, Business Negotiation and Communication, Customer Relationship Management, Channel Management, Sales Techniques
			Marketing (4+0)	Market Research and Analysis, Marketing Planning, Advertising Practice, Retail Practices, Sales Techniques, Business Communication and Negotiation, Luxury Culture, Channel Management, Brand Management, ERP Simulation Practice, Customer Relationship Management, Service Marketing, Economics
Sanya University of Hotel Management	Private	Department of Tourism Management	Marketing (Luxury Goods Marketing)	Introduction to Luxury Goods Marketing, International Marketing, Maintenance and Care of Luxury Goods, Luxury Goods Display Design, International Brand Appreciation, Luxury Brand Management, Shopping Mall Operations, Business Negotiation, Marketing Planning, New Media Marketing
			Marketing (New Media Operations)	Introduction to New Media Marketing, Media Management, New Media Marketing Planning and Practice, Digital Media Design and Practice, New Media Copywriting and Practice, New Media Marketing Technology and Practice, Multi-Platform New Media Practice, New Media Data Analysis and Application, Community Marketing and Practice, Industry Laws and Regulations, Talent Management
			Marketing (Live Streaming Operations)	E-Commerce Live Streaming Operations and Practice, Short Video Production and Operations Practice, TikTok Live Streaming and Short Video Operations, Business Data Analysis and Application Practice, Copywriting and E-Commerce Writing, Multi-Platform E-Commerce Operations and Practice, Online Store Customer Service and Management, Community Operations and Practice, E-Commerce Laws and Regulations, Talent Management

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Note: The above data is sourced from the official websites of various higher vocational colleges in Hainan Province.

It is evident that when structuring their programs, most higher vocational colleges in Hainan have taken into account the province's tourism-centric economy by placing their marketing programs within tourism-related faculties. Notably, two colleges have even established their marketing programs within the School of International Tourism, indicating an initial strategic consideration for internationalization.

In terms of curriculum design, the marketing programs across these institutions primarily revolve around marketing theory, structured around a combination of foundational theory courses, core professional courses, and practical training modules. The variation in course offerings among these colleges is minimal. Aside from a few private institutions that have included international marketing components due to their specialized luxury marketing programs, most colleges have yet to incorporate an international perspective into their core courses. Thus, although marketing programs are widely offered across higher vocational colleges in Hainan, and some efforts have been made to develop the curriculum, there is still significant room for growth in terms of integrating features specific to the Hainan Free Trade Port and advancing the internationalization of these programs.

3. Current Challenges in the Internationalization of Marketing Programs at Hainan's Higher Vocational Colleges

3.1 Insufficient Emphasis and Unclear Internationalization Objectives

There is a prevailing societal bias against marketing programs, often equating them with sales, or even with mere promotion. This misconception severely limits the development of marketing as an academic discipline. Consequently, higher vocational colleges tend to focus more on programs that yield immediate, visible results in skill enhancement. In the process of internationalization, marketing programs receive significantly less attention compared to other disciplines with more apparent outcomes, and they often lack clear objectives for cultivating international talent. However, these institutions should recognize the inherent advantages of internationalizing marketing programs: On one hand, most marketing theories originate from abroad, and internationalization facilitates the introduction of advanced theories and case studies. On the other hand, marketing requires a keen understanding of market trends, and aligning with the dynamic international market can better integrate theory with practice. Especially in the current critical phase of the Hainan Free Trade Port's development, where the demand for internationally-oriented marketing talent is growing, greater emphasis should be placed on advancing the internationalization of marketing education.

3.2 Domestic-Centric Focus Hinders Alignment with International Standards

The Hainan Free Trade Port, with its focus on international markets, requires marketing professionals who can navigate the complexities of a global landscape and engage with foreign enterprises from around the world. These professionals must not only possess extensive knowledge of international marketing but also the ability to align with global standards. However, the marketing programs at Hainan's higher vocational colleges have yet to achieve this level of alignment in their talent development strategies. Most institutions

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design their core courses with a focus on domestic markets, leading to some redundancy in the curriculum. Only a few colleges have introduced courses with an international marketing focus. Additionally, classroom instruction is predominantly delivered in Chinese by local teachers, with limited involvement of foreign faculty or high-quality international courses. Opportunities for students to engage in face-to-face exchanges with faculty and students from international marketing institutions are also lacking. Such a domestic-centric approach not only makes the learning experience repetitive and dull but also deprives students of opportunities for international exposure, making it challenging to cultivate high-quality marketing professionals with a global perspective and the ability to provide international services.

3.3 Inadequate Faculty Capabilities and Lack of Support for Internationalized Teaching

A strong faculty is crucial for the sustained development of higher vocational colleges and serves as the vanguard in exploring internationalization. A fundamental and critical aspect of pursuing internationalization in marketing programs is the recruitment and development of high-quality faculty members with international expertise. These faculty members are essential for supporting the exploration of internationalized education. However, the current faculty composition at Hainan's higher vocational colleges shows a general lack of such high-level talent, along with insufficient mechanisms for fostering faculty development in internationalization. Most of the current faculty members are domestic graduates with solid theoretical backgrounds but limited capacity to explore internationalized teaching. Furthermore, there is a lack of institutional emphasis on faculty development in internationalization. Although many colleges have initiated partnerships with international institutions, the practical implementation often leans more towards formalism rather than pragmatism, failing to truly enhance faculty members' international capabilities. Only by recognizing the strategic importance of building an internationalized faculty team and translating this recognition into concrete training and exchange activities can colleges provide a solid and sustainable foundation for the internationalization of marketing programs.

4. Analysis of Opportunities for the Internationalization of Marketing Programs in Higher Vocational Colleges Under the Hainan Free Trade Port Framework

4.1 Global Market Development: The Increasing Trend of Marketing Internationalization

China is currently focused on establishing a new development pattern where domestic circulation is the mainstay, and domestic and international circulations mutually reinforce each other. In recent years, despite the volatile international landscape, China's economy has withstood various pressures and risks, continuing to develop steadily. This has accelerated the positive interaction between domestic and international circulations. The widespread use of the internet worldwide has further fueled economic globalization, broadening the market scope for enterprises and simultaneously presenting more formidable challenges. Amid intensifying domestic market competition and growing risks associated with traditional export models, Chinese companies are now more inclined to adopt localized services and production strategies as they expand internationally. As the economic barometer, marketing will play an increasingly vital role in guiding these efforts in the wave of globalization. Particularly as Chinese enterprises accelerate their expansion into overseas markets, the de-

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mand for advanced international marketing capabilities has surged. Evidently, the internationalization of marketing has become an inevitable trend and will be the primary direction for future marketing development.

4.2 Support for Internationalization in Higher Vocational Education through the Hainan Free Trade Port Development

In 2019, the Ministry of Education and the Hainan Provincial Government jointly formulated the "Implementation Plan for Supporting Hainan in Deepening Education Reform and Opening-Up," which charted the course for Hainan's educational institutions to pursue internationalization. As an economically special zone marked by high-level openness, Hainan not only aims to establish a successful free trade port, achieving comprehensive openness in economic and political spheres, but also seeks to become an international education innovation hub, fostering openness and innovation in thought and culture. In the process of deepening educational reform and opening up, Hainan plans to pilot independent education programs from foreign institutions within the province, attract top-tier international universities to collaborate in Hainan, and actively promote the reform and upgrading of local institutions. By integrating local characteristics with global practices, Hainan seeks to explore a new model of higher education that blends internationalization with local needs. Specifically for higher vocational education, Hainan has proposed the implementation of a Modern Vocational Education Enhancement Plan, involving multiple stakeholders—government, schools, and enterprises—to ensure that the province's policies on educational reform and opening-up are effectively implemented in vocational colleges. This will gradually lead to the steady internationalization of higher vocational institutions. Thus, under the backdrop of the Hainan Free Trade Port, the internationalization of higher vocational education in Hainan enjoys robust policy support.

4.3 Evolving Job Market: Increasing Demand for Internationally Competent Marketing Talent

The extensive application of advanced technologies, such as mobile internet, on a global scale has truly turned the world into a "global village," where people can enjoy global goods and services without leaving their homes. For enterprises, this evolution in the international market represents new opportunities, as well as new challenges. On one hand, companies now have greater opportunities to directly interact with customers from international markets, simplifying previously cumbersome processes, reducing costs, and better understanding customers' actual needs to develop more suitable marketing strategies. On the other hand, companies must navigate a more complex market environment, where cultural differences and varying commercial practices between nations become critical factors to consider when entering international markets. This trend imposes higher demands on companies' marketing departments, requiring a workforce that not only possesses strong foreign language communication skills but also understands the cultural and ideological differences between the East and West, alongside mature marketing thinking and proficient marketing skills. Currently, the talent market shows a shortage of such internationally competent marketing professionals, indicating significant potential for future development.

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5. Exploring Pathways for the Internationalization of Marketing Programs in Higher Vocational Colleges Under the Free Trade Port Framework

5.1 Establishing Internationalized Training Objectives Aligned with Global Needs

The construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) is anchored in three key industries: tourism, modern services, and high-tech industries. Among these, the development of tourism and modern services will drive significant demand for marketing talent. As Hainan's level of openness to the world increases, this demand will increasingly shift toward high-quality professionals with international marketing expertise. Consequently, higher vocational colleges in Hainan must align their training objectives with the province's unique characteristics and future development direction, gradually adjusting the goals of their marketing programs. Hainan's focus will expand beyond the domestic market to encompass broader international markets, necessitating a shift in the training objectives of marketing programs toward internationalization. This requires a top-down recognition of the necessity and importance of marketing's global trajectory. Not only should these institutions leverage the inherent advantages of marketing for internationalization, positioning themselves as pioneers of international development in vocational education, but they should also build on Hainan's distinctive characteristics to create a unique "testing ground" for international marketing development.

5.2 Leading the Trend: Developing an Internationalized Talent Training Program

Under the backdrop of the FTP construction, Hainan is committed to fostering a high-level, outward-facing economy and establishing itself as an international tourism consumption center. This commitment raises the bar for Hainan's service capabilities toward foreign enterprises and amplifies the demand for highly skilled international talent. Vocational colleges in Hainan, benefiting from the unique advantages provided by the FTP, should lead the trend in the internationalization of vocational education. Facing broader international markets, the marketing programs in these colleges should gradually transition their curriculum towards internationalization. This involves strengthening the integration of foreign language instruction with marketing education, providing a bilingual teaching environment, and enhancing students' language proficiency. Students should be encouraged to take multiple foreign language courses during their studies, ensuring they acquire the basic language skills needed to serve international enterprises. Furthermore, international exchanges and collaborations should be intensified. Colleges should establish agreements with top international vocational institutions, sending students to developed countries and regions to learn advanced marketing knowledge. Importing high-quality international teaching resources and inviting distinguished foreign teachers to the classroom will not only impart advanced marketing knowledge but also help students gain a deeper understanding of international markets, thereby enhancing their international marketing capabilities.

5.3 Leveraging Internationalization Characteristics: Enhancing the Quality of Faculty

The effectiveness of marketing programs in vocational colleges is primarily reflected in the development of students' marketing thinking, which is challenging to measure quantitatively. This places higher demands on the teaching level and abilities of faculty members. Teachers must not only impart relevant marketing theories but also subtly instill marketing thinking methods. As marketing moves towards internationalization, it will

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present new challenges for educators. Therefore, in promoting the internationalization of marketing education, it is essential to strengthen faculty development, combining the recruitment of high-quality teachers with opportunities for existing faculty to gain international exposure. Recruitment strategies should be promptly adjusted, capitalizing on Hainan's "Million Talents Initiative," to attract more outstanding teachers with overseas study or exchange experience, thus bolstering the talent pool for internationalization. Additionally, opportunities for in-house teachers to "go out" should be provided, allowing them to study at top international marketing institutions and participate in long-term or short-term training programs offered by international schools. This approach ensures that as marketing programs advance towards internationalization, faculty development leads the way, setting a strong educational foundation.

6. Conclusion

The construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port is accelerating, and with it comes a substantial demand for high-quality, internationally competent marketing professionals. Currently, the quantity and quality of marketing talent in Hainan fall short of meeting the continuous needs of the FTP, creating an urgent need for sustained efforts by colleges to cultivate marketing professionals with solid skills and a global perspective. Hainan's vocational colleges should seize this opportunity for international transformation, leveraging local advantages while focusing on the practical needs of the FTP. By tapping into various resources and exploring unique pathways for the internationalization of marketing programs, these institutions can play a crucial role in nurturing excellent, application-oriented marketing talents capable of international service, thereby injecting fresh energy and providing continuous momentum for the development of the Hainan Free Trade Port.

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