

The Enhancement of Rural Tourism Experience in Huangling Village, Jiangxi Province, China through Social Media

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Abstract:

This study investigates the transformation of Huangling Village in Jiangxi Province, China, from a declining “empty village” into a popular rural tourism destination through the application of 4I theory on social media platforms such as Douyin, WeChat, and Rednote. By analyzing the village’s marketing strategies, we identify key challenges: content homogeneity in short videos, insufficient discounts and unique offerings during peak seasons, limited interaction channels with tourists, and a monolithic brand image centered on “Autumn Display” and ancient architecture. To address these issues, countermeasures like micro-film storytelling, early-bird bundles, cross-platform memberships and AI-guided seasonal routes—are proposed and evaluated. The findings suggest that the Huangling model offers a replicable roadmap for other rural destinations aiming for sustainable tourism development, emphasizing the importance of innovation, engagement, and personalization in the digital age.

Keywords: social media marketing; rural tourism experience; Huangling Village; 4I theory.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the acceleration of urbanization, people’s yearning for rural life and natural scenery has gradually increased. Rural tourism has thus seized an unprecedented opportunity and has rapidly flourished worldwide. It is regarded as a crucial pathway for promoting rural economic growth and a significant component of the tourism market [1]. Meanwhile, with the rapid development of internet technology, social media platforms such as Weibo, TikTok, and Instagram have gradually taken over people’s daily lives. Taesung Brian Kim emphasized

that social media is able to meet the needs of all the stakeholders such as tourists, tourism destinations, and potential on a single platform. Social network sites are not only a vital challenge but also a great opportunity for tourism industries to take advantage of [2].

In Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province of China, rural tourism has always been a prominent industry in the region. Huangling Village was once a typical “empty village” in the mountainous area, facing problems such as population outflow and lagging economic development. However, with the help of social media and through innovative marketing, Huangling Village

has developed a series of distinctive tourism products, attracting a large number of tourists to visit. It successfully transformed from a vanishing traditional village into a popular tourist destination. The successful transformation of Huangling Village not only promoted local economic development but also provided valuable experience for other similar rural areas, and is of strong typicality and research value.

The village of Huangling in Wuyuan, as a representative case of rural tourism, can be studied to deeply analyze the mechanism of the role of social media in different stages of rural tourism, the challenges it faces, and the solutions adopted. This thereby expands the theoretical research scope of the integration of rural tourism and social media, constructs a more complete theoretical system, and at the same time provides a reference model for the development of rural tourism in other regions around the world.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Rural Tourism Experience

Rural tourism relies on agricultural resources and rural environment, and achieves agricultural value increase and rural economic development through tourism activities [3]. Rural tourism experience refers to an immersive participation, interaction and perception process where tourists obtain a comprehensive tourism experience that is different from urban landscapes, with the core attractions being the natural ecology, agricultural production, local culture and rural lifestyle. Its main component lies in the deep connection between tourism and culture.

2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media offer a promising opportunity for the marketing of rural tourism [4]. Social media platforms possess characteristics such as interactivity, immediacy and wide dissemination. Compared with traditional offline advertising methods, social media marketing not only has lower costs, but also provides rich data statistics and analysis tools, which facilitate tourism enterprises and destinations to monitor the effectiveness of marketing activities in real time, and promptly understand tourists' demand preferences, behavioral habits and feedback on marketing content.

This study employed 4I theory which was proposed by Professor Don Schultz from Northwestern University in the 1990s. It emphasizes the strategic shift from a "sender-centered" to an "audience-centered" communication model [5]. Based on 4I marketing theory, this study analyzes the social media marketing measures of Huangling Village from four aspects: Interesting, Interests, Interaction, and Individual. It examines their advantages and

problems, laying a theoretical foundation for other similar villages to follow its development model.

3. Using the 4I theory to analyze the application and problems of social media in the tourism marketing of Huangling Village

Huangling Village boasts diverse natural landscapes throughout the four seasons. Not only does it feature a terraced landscape hailed as one of the most beautiful in China, but it also has abundant forest resources and several mountain streams running through the village. Tourists can come here to get close to nature and experience the rural scenery.

In terms of cultural landscapes, Huangling Village boasts over 10 intangible cultural heritages. Among them, the "Huizhou Three Carvings" technique has been included in the first batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in China. The Autumn Display is also a distinctive cultural symbol of Huangling Village. The brightly colored grains intermingle with the black-and-white houses, not only showcasing the local agricultural culture but also providing tourists with a unique visual experience [6]. Additionally, Huangling Village also preserves a large number of traditional Huizhou-style buildings and ancient villages, showcasing superb architectural skills and profound historical heritage, allowing tourists to experience the charm of Chinese traditional culture up close.

3.1 The homogeneity of content leads to a lack of interestingness

The interestingness of marketing content can arouse consumers' willingness to spread and share more than other characteristics, and the interestingness of content promotes consumers to have a positive image of the brand [7]. Huangling Village has utilized platforms such as Douyin to release a large amount of interesting content, creating video topics like "Huangling Window View" to showcase the unique scenery and ancient architectural style of Huangling Village, using vivid and engaging content to attract tourists to imitate the shooting and upload to social media. Furthermore, Huangling Village has organized the "Autumn Display" event, using crops to dry into various interesting patterns in autumn, which has attracted extensive attention from mainstream media and online media both at home and abroad. On platforms such as WeChat and Rednote, Huangling Village also releases a large number of travel guides and real travel stories of tourists, introducing the tourist attractions in an interesting and humorous way, and stimulating tourists' interest in traveling to Huangling Village.

However, the development of video content in Huangling Village placed more emphasis on form rather than on the cultural connotations. This led to an increasing number of rural areas began to imitate the short-video marketing model of Huangling Village, and the problem of content homogeneity gradually emerged. Excessive similar marketing content would cause tourists' attention to be distracted. Besides, although Huangling Village has made certain innovations in interesting activities, the activity forms such as "Autumn Display" are still relatively simple, and the novelty for tourists will gradually decrease over time.

3.2 The discount is not sufficient and the souvenirs lack uniqueness

The interests of tourists are usually of two kinds: material and spiritual. Material benefits are usually direct and tangible, such as special offers for tourists, while spiritual benefits are those that satisfy tourists' inner needs, such as emotional value [8].

Firstly, Huangling Village launched a series of group-buying packages through its WeChat official account and Douyin platform. Tourists can book tickets and accommodations through these channels and enjoy discount offers. This direct benefit approach has attracted many tourists. Secondly, Huangling Village promotes local specialty agricultural products and handicrafts, such as Wuyuan green tea, through social media platforms, so that tourists can conveniently taste local cuisine and purchase local souvenirs, which not only increases the value of the tourism experience, but also enhances the emotional value that Huangling Village provides to tourists.

Although Huangling Village has launched many promotional activities, during the peak tourist season, the ticket and accommodation prices remain high, failing to meet tourists' demands for high value for money. At the same time, some unique products in this area have similar features to those of other rural tourism destinations, lacking uniqueness in the souvenirs, resulting in a decline in product competitiveness.

3.3 Insufficient interactive channels lead to the loss of potential tourists

The interaction principle in the 4I theory emphasizes that in new media marketing, it is necessary to attach importance to the participation and sharing needs of consumers or users. By innovating interaction methods to communicate with consumers, only in this way can a true emotional bond be established between the company and consumers or users [9].

Huangling Village conducts real-time interactions with tourists on multiple platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin. Tourists can post comments in the comment

section, and the staff will promptly reply and answer tourists' questions. This real-time interaction model has enhanced tourists' trust in Huangling Village and has also converted many potential customers who commented due to their travel intentions. In addition, Huangling Village also launched various topic challenges such as "Display Autumn Together" on Douyin, attracting the participation of numerous travel bloggers, photography enthusiasts and tourists. Tourists could share their travel videos on the topics and interact with other tourists, creating a positive community atmosphere.

However, at present, the platform that provides real-time interaction for tourists mainly focuses on a few social media. For some emerging social platforms, such as Rednote and Bilibili, Huangling Village has not yet expanded its interaction channels, which has led to the loss of a part of the potential tourist groups on these emerging platforms.

3.4 Personalized tourism still has room for development

In the process of marketing on social media platforms, accurate positioning of users is very important [10]. Huangling Village has launched various personalized tourism products according to the needs of different tourists. For example, for families with children, they offer family activities and family-style homestays, and for photography enthusiasts, they provide local costume photography packages, etc. At the same time, Huangling Village also releases personalized travel guides on social platforms based on tourists' preferences and travel time, detailing the travel routes and activity suggestions, bringing tourists a personalized experience.

Although Huangling Village has launched personalized tourism products, its tourism destination image still mainly focuses on "Autumn Display" and the traditional Huizhou-style ancient buildings, lacking more unique and innovative images. This will lead to limitations in the tourism experience, making it difficult to meet the needs of diversified travel experiences.

4. Measures to address existing problems

4.1 Interesting innovations to address the homogenization

To address the issue of content homogeneity, Huangling Village can first consider integrating natural landscapes with human stories. To publish contents that are interesting to a large number of users, it is important to consider the content's popularity [11]. Huangling Village can collaborate with professional video teams to create some high-quality creative videos. For instance, they can pro-

duce a series of micro films to tell traditional customs and historical stories, or they can invite filming crews to shoot TV dramas with Huangling Village as the shooting location, telling love or family stories, to attract a larger group of young tourists.

Meanwhile, Huangling Village can also launch various special activities according to different seasons and festivals. For instance, during the Spring Festival, a series of videos titled “The Chinese New Year in Huangling Village” could be presented to showcase the Spring Festival customs and special delicacies of Huangling Village, thereby attracting tourists to visit the village during the Spring Festival. In summer, a series called “Summer Resort” can be launched to display the beautiful scenery and delicious food, to attract tourists to experience the cool summer here.

4.2 Launch discounted packages to safeguard tourists’ interests

Local government should devote more time and energy to involving the local population in the process of resource valorization [12]. To address the issue of insufficient discounts during peak seasons, Huangling Village can offer more cost-effective options to tourists by launching family packages and team-building packages, or by introducing “early bird tickets” that can be booked in advance to offer discounts to visitors. At the same time, it can also collaborate with homestays and restaurants to introduce combined discounts for food and accommodation, thereby increasing tourists’ willingness to spend in various aspects. Furthermore, Huangling Village can collaborate with well-known brands to launch joint products. For instance, it can partner with a famous tea brand to create “Huangling Milk Green Tea” and invite celebrities to promote it. This not only attracts a large number of young customers but also enhances the market competitiveness of Huangling Green Tea.

4.3 Expand interaction channels and encourage tourists to participate

To enhance the depth of interaction with tourists, Huangling Village can introduce a membership system, providing personalized exclusive interactive experiences for members. For instance, members can enjoy dedicated reception, special discounts and invitations to exclusive activities, which can increase tourist loyalty. Expanding interaction channels is also a crucial aspect. Huangling Village should actively explore emerging social platforms. In addition, social media is an important channel of communication with consumers in the area of improving the product offer, so that expanding interaction channels is also an important aspect [13]. Huangling Village should actively explore new social platforms. For example, they

can open an official account on Rednote to publish travel guides and recommendation notes, thereby attracting more female tourists to visit. Additionally, they can regularly post lottery activities on social media to encourage tourists to comment and share to get prizes, thereby enhancing the tourists’ sense of participation.

4.4 Customized travel guide, meeting needs of individuality

With the surge in cultural heritage tourism, personalized tourism route planning has emerged as a crucial strategy to enrich tourists’ experiences. Huangling Village can introduce an intelligent guided tour system. Tourists can customize their own personalized services through the mobile app. For instance, based on the tourist’s selected interests and accommodation location, the app can intelligently customize the travel route and special activities, as well as providing audio explanations and navigation services. The personalized tour route recommendation will not only enhance tourist satisfaction but also provide data and theoretical support for the tourism industry in Huangling Village [14].

Apart from the “Autumn Display” and ancient buildings, Huangling Village can explore more distinctive cultural elements. For example, they could launch the “Four Seasons of Huangling” brand image based on the different scenery throughout the year, or hold more activities related to intangible cultural heritage and handicraft making, allowing tourists to have a more personalized understanding of the historical background and cultural connotations of Huangling Village.

5. Conclusion

This study is based on the 4I marketing theory and systematically explores how Huangling Village successfully transformed from an “empty village” to a popular tourism destination with the help of social media.

The existing problems are as follows: from the perspective of interest, there is content homogeneity; from the perspective of interests, there are insufficient seasonal discounts; from the perspective of interaction, the channels are single; from the perspective of individuality, the brand symbols are monotonous. Meanwhile, the following strategies were proposed: “Micro films and seasonal IPs” to break the homogeneity, “Early bird tickets and joint packages” to enhance the cost-effectiveness, “Membership system and cross-platform” to broaden interaction, and “Seasons themes and intelligent guided tours” to enrich personalized experiences.

However, this study has some limitations in terms of the research perspective. The current research mainly relies on supply-side information such as official releases and

publicly available content, without systematically collecting the perceptual differences, emotional fluctuations, and satisfaction changes of tourists before and after using social media. Future research can use questionnaire surveys and interview methods to track the emotional curves and behaviors of the same group of tourists throughout the travel process, and use more standard first-hand data to verify the effect of social media intervention.

Overall, as long as we adhere to the logic of “interesting content - interests’ diversification - interaction depth - experience individuality”, the Huangling model can provide a replicable model for more rural destinations around the world, enabling the high-quality development of rural tourism.

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