

Social Media Tourism Marketing Optimization: Improving Promotion Effectiveness and Broadening the Consumer Base

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Abstract: This research investigates the price-based strategy of social media in tourism marketing, specifically in China. The study involves both primary and secondary methodology research, represented in qualitative format. The primary research evidence is collected from Chinese travelers and relevant people in the travel industry by using online questionnaires and interviews since it is a more efficient way to receive more responses within less amount of time. On the other hand, secondary evidence is collected from various online sources, including relevant and credible articles, news reports, and academic essays. According to the secondary evidence, the key areas considered in the pricing-based Marketing Landscape for the Travel industry on social media are the challenges, stakeholders' perceptions, pricing-based strategies, and the impact of social media marketing. By evaluating the evidence and data, the research concludes that from both social and economic perspectives, social media marketing has a more significant positive impact than a negative one on the views of companies and customers, which benefit both firms and consumers in terms of the ability to provide better product quality. This research further shows that the tourism industry needs to adopt a pricing strategy tailored to firms' specific cases in order to achieve more effective marketing and operation efficiency with long-term development.

Keywords: Social media marketing, China, Tourism, Price marketing strategies

1. Introduction

Social media's widespread promotion by influential corporations has made it indispensable to many individuals worldwide. It is an efficient tool that can be used in various ways in everyday life, containing access to knowledge, entertainment, and education. As a significant role in people's daily life, social media has been developed for around a decade, and its influence on people's decisions and purchase preferences continues to grow [1]. Since travel is a long-standing social activity, the influence of social media is essential to the tourism industry [2]. With the popularity of millennials posting their travel experiences on the web, as well as by third-party sites, the social media internet is now a gathering place for visuals and commentary, providing a wealth of accessible and compelling content to inspire travelers, such as primary experiences and selfies from various people [3].

In today's digital era, social media has become one of the most important channels for marketing in the tourism industry [4]. Facilitated by social media platforms and tools, the tourism corporation can establish a more direct and closer connection with potential customers and tourists, and attract users' attention and increase brand awareness and influence through different social media promotion

methods. Research has shown that approximately 70% of travelers use Instagram to find inspiration for new trips[5]. This has prompted the travel business to shift its promotional tactics towards social media, focusing on developing engaging content to connect with potential customers and boost revenue, leveraging their unique strengths to gain a competitive edge in the market[6].

Tourism has become an essential contributor to China's domestic economy, and in terms of general trends, the tourism boom continued to rise constantly before the Covid-19 epidemic. According to a statistics report [7], the number of domestic tourists reached 6 billion in 2019, and the total revenue of the tourism industry was about 6.6 trillion yuan. At the same time, more than 28 million people are engaged in related tourism in China. The tourism sector in China has emerged as a focal point of global interest for both inbound and outbound tourism due to the large number of trips it takes to generate significant revenue and market advancement. As a result, this research is mainly focused on the tourism business and social media in China.

Moreover, social media is a proper promotional medium for travel commerce as it has a large platform to attract people by various promotional strategies. There are a variety of promotion strategies regarding different pricing based on social media marketing in the travel corporation. It has five fundamental parts: profile optimization, posting, engaging, advertising, and measuring [8]. Each component within the realm is instrumental to optimizing promotional efficacy and thus captivating an increased customer base. Therefore, this research aims to identify which part of social media marketing strategies should spending allocation and investing in it and how it influences people's decisions. This study aims to include the research questions: What is the impact of different pricing-based promotional strategies on social media marketing in the travel industry in China?

In this context, the interview assesses the impact of price on different promotional techniques, the political and economic impact of promotional strategies, different types of price-based promotional strategies, barriers, and the future development of social media marketing, specifically for the tourism business in China. Questionnaires elicit data on obtaining information on promotional strategies and tourism prices employed in data of Chinese travelers across cultural, age, and gender cohorts on social media. As a result, this research examines the impact of different pricing-based promotional strategies on global social media marketing in travel commerce, specifically in China.

2. Literature Review

Various studies on social media and tourism have identified the criticality of travelers' decision-making (consumer choice or preference) and diverse promotional strategies for marketing. Social media marketing is a cost-effective tool for travel agencies seeking to reach a wider audience, promote their products and services, and establish long-term customer relationships [9]. Social media platforms greatly influence the traveler's decision-making process, especially in the pre-trip phase when travelers search heavily for destination information, such as hotel and restaurant reviews and recommendations from others. "Social media platforms play a key role in shaping travelers' attitudes and perceptions of destinations, hotels, and airlines, ultimately influencing their travel choices" [10]. Before traveling, travelers find the best travel plans and options on social media regarding their budget and travel priorities (food/scenic areas/exceptional experiences); this presents substantial opportunities for enterprises in the travel industry. "Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow travel companies to differentiate themselves and creatively build a unique brand image." [11]

With the assistance of social media, travel companies can change their promotional strategies by targeting specific audiences, showcasing services that align with specific audiences, and creating brand loyalty while changing travelers' decisions [12]. Additionally, the travel industry can utilize user-generated content, such as social media posts containing reviews and photos, to measure audience engagement with specific travel products or services. Users can express favorable

sentiments regarding their travel experiences on social media platforms. A study has found that "social media posts with visual content tend to have higher engagement rates than text-only posts, suggesting that visuals are an important factor in audience engagement" [13]. Social networking tools on social media can play a critical role in addressing these challenges by facilitating knowledge sharing, collaboration, and communication between different stakeholders in the corporation. Travel management can be significantly enhanced when experiences are shared, and the most appropriate strategies are found; among them is a social networking strategy for the tourism industry, which includes identifying key stakeholders, developing social networking platforms, and implementing knowledge management and communication plans.

3. Research Methods

The literature review on social media and the travel business is conducted at the beginning. Secondary research on social media and promotional strategies in the travel industry was carried out by qualitative analysis of existing achievements, popular press articles, and pricing-related posts. Content analysis of social media platforms in the travel industry on social media is also conducted to gain comprehensive knowledge. The research consists of background information, different aspects (social, political, and economic) and pricing-based promotional methods, and other detailed information through a literature review to respond to the question. After identifying the final research questions, a questionnaire with approximated items related to existing surveys and interviews was built up by reading literature reviews. Interviews will be conducted online with people who work in the travel industry to investigate the different promotional strategies and to have travel industry managers evaluate the impact of price on promotional strategies, as well as on the political and economic impacts of promotional strategies, different types of pricing-based promotional strategies, obstacles, and future development on social media marketing, specific to the travel commerce. Questionnaires will be sent online to social media platforms to obtain information on the types of promotional strategies that travel corporations tend to use and the price of travel from different cultural backgrounds, age groups, and genders. This topic will be further explored through a literature review, interviews, and questionnaires to understand the impact of different price promotional strategies on social media marketing in the tourism business.

3.1. Interview

Further subjective information was accumulated through in-depth interviews with participants working in social media or the travel industry. Although interviews are the most suitable way to obtain reliable information and explore what cannot be searched online, and the number of participants requires comprehensive explanation. The researcher used online appointments to communicate with the workshop participants, as online communication is more time efficient and not limited by location, as well as records the results of the interview information to the maximum extent possible through electronic recording screens. Interviews are pre-booked and last an average of 30 minutes. After the interviews, the information will be organized through the recorded screens. The transcripts and responses will be analyzed to extract the dimensions influencing social media marketing in the tourism industry.

3.2. Survey Questionnaire

The survey collected quantitative data and insights from at least 100 simulated consumers. The authors posted the questionnaire online, which included the research objectives and goals of the survey, which was anonymous. All participants were familiar with Chinese or English as a learning medium. In addition, care was taken to avoid jargon and obscure language in the questionnaire.

questions to avoid confusing the respondents. The inclusion of more closed-ended questions rather than open-ended questions in the questions will contribute to collecting data results for analysis better and reduce the possibility of bias. Furthermore, closed-ended questions can better guide participants to answer them more efficiently, which is also more suitable for quantitative data. The graphical information will be more straightforward to understand for the reader.

According to the results, people under the age of 45 are usually more active on social media. Social media can be used in a variety of ways. The result of social media being used as a tool in a travel plan shows 43% rely on social media to assist with frequent travel arrangements, and up to 97% use social media to succor with travel arrangements. The research [14] has found many travel content online for reference. With many review posts, people can evaluate and choose which option they like better and which is more suitable for them. As a result, it shows that social media is widely used for travel plans in all age groups who are willing to plan their travel due to the great content on social media.

Approximately 60% of Chinese travelers have seen travel advertisement posts on social media; 37 percent have seen them at least five times a month; and 35% do not remember. This also means that more than 60% have seen a travel advertisements posted on social media. The Chinese Tiktok and Xiaohongshu have the most posts about travel on their platforms, up to 75%. According to the research [15], there will be more than 730 million Chinese Tiktok users and more than 43 million Xiaohongshu users in 2022 [16]. Among this 60% of Chinese travelers, 60% believe that domestic travel is more likely to receive social media advertising, a choice that encompasses the impact of epidemics, financial needs, visas, and more.

While AI chatbots have become the new trend for searching for information searching, they are still no substitute for social media regarding the impact on the travel industry. Instead of approximately 90% of people never use chatbots to design their travel plans, 70% of people may use specific websites to design their travel because there is multiple and real-life feedback from different people. Therefore, they may think websites are more reliable than chatbots. Approximately 90% of people think social media posts influence their travel plans.

There are mainly four reasons for people writing travel plans using social media: less time-spending, comparing different prices, and looking at real-live feedback. Comparing the three reasons for using media, the choice of price consideration factor is less influential than the other two choices. Few people choose the price because of “connecting, engaging, and being in trend” [17] As with this statement, people are looking at the travel experience and the feelings of others. Also, since the travel plan is preparing for the unknown experience, social media gives more security to people to travel to a place they never went before, decreasing the time spent researching books or websites. Therefore, travelers attach importance to the time spend and feedback regarding social media use.

Travelers may change their decision because of lower prices, new ideas, and other people’s feedback. The most expected one is the ‘lower price’ because travel is not immune to inflation, especially after the covid-19, and travelers must go through their budget and pick the best option for their trip [18].

According to the results of decision making that may affected by social media, approximately 71% of participants prefer an individual trip with a standard purchase because freedom, convenience, flexibility, and personalization is more desirable. It indicates that there is an enormous need for social media as many people have to create a travel plan by themselves.

The results of package and regular purchases, approximately 50% of people prefer seasonal pricing by choosing a low price in the off-season, and 72% are willing to choose seasonal pricing. The reason for not choosing spontaneous pricing is that many people do not have the ability and time to travel immediately, and they need more time to prepare for a good journey. This also emphasizes the

importance of a travel plan. As a result, seasonal pricing in the off-season is better than spontaneous pricing regarding the difficulties of abilities and time flexibility, as well as a desirable travel plan.

Some common promotional strategies examples on social media attract many people into a journey in China. The most typically used one is the recommendation from social media bloggers. Composing blogs with many fans can maximize the attraction to travelers. For example, Chongqing has become a 'Netflix City' on Chinese Tiktok in the recent year. Multiple blogs were depicting how magical and beautiful it is in Chongqing, which attracts a large number of tourists to the city. According to the statistics [19], 30,219,000 tourists traveled to Chongqing in the first quarter of 2023.

4. Discussion

Insights from the literature review and interviews helped to gather the impact and challenges of price-based marketing on social media for the tourism industry in China. The factors and knowledge gained through the research process were used to develop a framework for understanding the social, economic, and political implications of price-based promotions in the social media travel industry. It is helpful for social media and tourism practitioners, researchers, as well as Chinese government department officials to use as a reference.

4.1. Challenges

Marketing strategies in the tourism and social media industry are necessary. According to the interview, this is because China's travel market is highly competitive, the diversity of the market allows for a wide range of consumer choices, and the travel and social media industries are highly dependent on users and customers.

The research has shown [20] that there were 42432 travel agencies in the year 2021 in China. An already competitive market, with up to 17,000 Chinese companies closing down in 2019 due to the COVID-19 blitz [21]. With the unprecedented challenges posed by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, travel and tourism are quickly becoming one of the most affected economic sectors globally, especially in China [22]. Nevertheless, utilizing Ministry of Culture and Tourism data, 52 million and 251 million trips were made nationwide during the 2022 New Year's Day and Spring Festival. Although decreased by 5.3% and 2.0% compared to previous years, ticket sales rose again at the start of the 2022 summer vacation season, and domestic tourism recovered strongly by the 2023 Spring Festival. For example, Hainan attracted more than 800,000 visitors during the Spring Festival than in 2019, and Shanghai saw 10 million visitors, roughly twice as many as during the 2019 holiday [23]. With the rise of tourism again, it has intensified the competitiveness in the business; in order to stand out from the rival companies, promotional strategies are essential.

On the other hand, inferring from the highly competitive tourism commerce, there are numerous choices for consumers, which highlights why tourism companies have to market themselves on social platforms. According to the primary research, advertising input from social media is essential; up to sixty-five percent of people have seen advertisements from travel corporations on social media in the last month. Of all respondents, Chinese Tiktok accounted for about 50 percent of all social media advertisements. A study [24] has shown that TikTok's ads are charged on a CPT basis, where the buyer assumes all risks and other costs after delivery, with prices starting at 1 million yuan per ad. In addition, running a TikTok sticker ad costs \$300,000 per day and takes at least seven days each time; it costs a total of \$2.1 million to run an ad. The price of the advertisement is too high on social media; if the travel industry intends to post, they should consider and compare marketing costs and interest rates to avoid a financial turnaround crisis.

Moreover, the primacy of social media in the travel business is substantiated by the primary research that up to ninety-seven percent of people utilize social media as an instrument for travel

planning. As the primary research has shown, the tourism industry's reliance on social media is growing, and they have become an integral part of tourism marketing. With social media's powerful promotional effect and user stickiness, travel commerce can target its customer base more precisely, increase brand awareness and sales, and boost business. However, if excessive promotion and hype lead to a lot of false information and misinformation, it can negatively affect the development of the company and even the local tourism industry.

As a result, it is essential for the travel and social media industries to invest heavily in rational pricing-based marketing strategies with high-quality products or services to attract more potential customers and users and increase brand awareness and reach.

4.2. Stakeholder Perception

4.2.1. Customers

Stakeholders have their own unique views and representations of this research topic. There is a particular pattern of development in this business: customer loyalty. The most advantageous trend in the tourism industry is receiving numerous positive online social media reviews. An effective way of gaining customer loyalty in the tourism corporation is to open official accounts on social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and especially Chinese Tiktok, as explained before. The purpose is to review tourism products and services to potential customers and tourists by posting exciting and appealing photos, videos, and texts. In addition, the tourism business can take advantage of the social attributes of social media to encourage users to share their travel experiences, reviews, and ratings, thereby increasing trust and recognition of tourism products and services and improving reputation and user loyalty. Increasing customer loyalty in the travel industry on social media requires enhancing customer experience, delivering digital experience, as well as personalized marketing and communication; they are different parts of online reviews [25] As a result, the key to gain customer loyalty in the travel corporation on social media depends on online reviews from various social media.

4.2.2. Management and Operation

The tourism industry can target its market and target audience more precisely by leveraging social media's powerful promotional effect and user stickiness. According to the interview, in order to maximize economic and social benefits, the most effective customer-focused price-based marketing strategies are evaluated and optimized according to the actual situation of the tourism industry and the characteristics of the target customers. Market research and data analysis can be used to understand users' needs and preferences, as well as competitors' strategies and market performance, and to select the most suitable price marketing strategy for themselves. The leadership vision and company objectives are significant for choosing the best customer-focused marketing strategies for their specific company, as tourism pricing strategies also need to consider the balance between cost and profitability[]. The balance between cost and profitability is one of the main perspectives from stakeholders because they need to estimate the value of the company; whether it is worth it for them. Therefore, the company should target its audience, evaluate and optimize marketing strategies and ensure a certain level of profitability.

4.3. Pricing-Based Strategies

Price-based marketing strategy is a common marketing strategy that increases sales and brand awareness by lowering the price of a product or service to attract customers through promotions, discounts, price adjustments, and combination sales [26]. This strategy stimulates consumers' desire

to buy and increases the volume and frequency of their purchases, thereby increasing the company's sales and profits.

4.3.1. Improving quality and efficiency of products and services

While reducing the price, the quality of the product needs to be maintained or improved. Products and services with high quality cultivate positive brand equity and increase customer loyalty. Although a membership privilege strategy can increase user loyalty and frequency of consumption, it may require higher costs and investment. A higher-priced marketing strategy may be not the best marketing result because the tourism industry has diverse consumers with different needs and values for tourism products and services. At the same time, the priced-based strategy uses the terms of 'demand' that lowers the price so that more users are more willing and able to buy the products or services.[27]

4.3.2. Enhanced user experience and loyalty

The best results can be achieved if the price is lowered while maintaining quality, which enhances user experience and attracts more users to purchase the product or service. After traveling, they share feelings and photos on social media. Many users do not believe in the propaganda of travel companies and prefer to trust the actual user experience. As there are many positive reviews and recommendations from social media, more travelers will take notice and try new products or services as an experience. Since a large number of positive experiences on social media, customer loyalty will increase, and with a large number of sales, higher profits will be achieved, entering a virtuous circle (maintaining or increasing quality while increasing profits).

4.3.3. Optimize management and operation efficiency

The enhanced experience and loyalty drive a good reputation and maintain the company's long-term growth. The company will gain more trust from stakeholders with more investment and better development. Apart from a good reputation, the company should also pay attention to brand image, profit level, market demand, competitors, and other factors to constantly adjust and optimize the implementing and operating methods to maintain long-term growth[28].

4.3.4. Innovative tourism products and services

As technology persists to advance and the demand for digital services continues to grow, innovative tourism products and services are also the keys to the future of tourism. The tourism industry needs to develop and promote more distinctive and personalized tourism products and services, such as experiential tourism, cultural tourism, and eco-tourism. Tourism products and services that incorporate digital technology should also innovate, such as virtual tours and VR experiences, by combining user needs and market trends[29].

4.4. Impact

4.4.1. Firms

Pricing-based strategies reduce prices which also decreases profits. This may lead to other companies adopting a low-price strategy, which will increase the competitive pressure in the market and make the industry more risky. Moreover, travel corporations' lower profits will lead to more difficult capital turnover and lower productivity, thus entering a vicious circle, which will eventually cause production costs, difficulties in controlling quality, and the risk of closure. Policies may also have an indirect

effect on a firm's price-based strategy. The government can establish regulations that require firms to offer a certain percentage of discounted products or services. These regulations may influence firms' marketing methods, so they have to consider offering these discounted products or services to remain competitive[30].

On the other hand, the method brings many benefits to the company. It has enhanced brand image, sales revenue, visibility, and market share. With this marketing strategy, more visitors will be willing and able to purchase products and services, which also means more people will share their experiences on social media. Being more visible to the public on social media with a large audience can increase fame and attract more potential customers. Due to such promotion, sales revenue will increase, and the company's potential will attract more stakeholders to buy shares and invest in the company.

4.4.2. Customers

Social media provide customer networking so that they can express their opinions and authentic experience, as well as make travel tips and share their experiences with each other. At the same time, their experiences will drive more people to want to try. This also leads to trend-setting; when many people want to try something new, it will spark more people's interest in following the trend by imitating. For example, Chongqing is a city in China, and because it is famous online, almost everyone wants to go to Chongqing to experience the beauty, food, and human history that social media spreads.

When companies lower their prices, consumers can obtain goods or services at cheaper prices. However, the lower prices can also affect the quality of their products and services, affecting the benefits that consumers would otherwise enjoy.

4.5. Implications

This research paper is expected to be published as a manuscript in a journal for the sales department of the travel industry. The study shows an increasing trend for travelers to explore social media for trip planning, with price and quality being the top consumer choices. In commerce where price and quality are comparable, promotional strategies become an essential focus for becoming a decision target for travelers. Social media promotional strategies at various prices have diverse effects, so travel business companies must identify strategies with ultimate benefits from specific price-based promotional strategies. Therefore, this paper will take the impact of distinct price-based promotional strategies on social media marketing in the travel corporation as a starting point to explore the importance of price-based strategies and social media for the travel industry, as well as its future development from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, this paper provides knowledge and practical suggestions from consumers, society, social media platforms, travel business companies, tourism, and state governments to design tourism commerce.

4.6. Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations corresponding to this study include regional distinction and data collection. The questionnaire respondents were predominantly Chinese. Although there were many international students and some overseas Chinese from diverse social backgrounds, genders, and cultural levels, the social media focused more on the Chinese region than the world. In addition, the Chinese are more focused on social media as a decisive factor in travel planning, which may account for the minor impact and penetration of AI chatbots in China. Due to political reasons in China, the respondent's choice of social media software is almost nonexistent in the US; the social media platforms in the survey questionnaire are common in China instead of the countries in the rest of the world. Although there is Chinese Tiktok, it is still different from Tiktok.

Moreover, the limited number of participants in the interviews resulted in less overlapping information, and the information could more objective. Therefore, as the information answered by a small number of participants is inconsistent, it is impossible to compare the information's reliability by overlapping information. However, due to the biased information obtained, it is impossible to analyze each viewpoint entirely objectively, the information from the secondary research can be combined to analyze the reasons for the different answers given by the participants in more depth. As a result, it is appropriate to use primary and secondary research to obtain more reliable and in-depth information.

Future research directions for the study on the pricing-based promotional strategies on social media marketing in the travel industry specific to China could include exploring how the Chinese policies significantly affect the connection between social media and the travel business compared to the worldwide. Specifically, researchers could investigate the difference between Chinese social media, policies, and cultural influence on other countries, especially in European countries. Additionally, future exploration could explore the market planning changes for the tourism corporation to expand diversified business since it is one of the primary trends of the industry in the future.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the impact of the price-based strategy on social media in the travel industry specifically in China. This research paper focuses on the customers' perspectives from related industry workers towards the travel corporation on social media. Customer loyalty, preference, and customer orientation are found to be crucial in terms of deciding the promotion methods. Travel companies need to target their customers first and then attract more customers through price-based promotions and ways that specific target customers prefer. The price-based methods are social media marketing, improving the quality and efficiency of products and services, enhancing user experience and loyalty, optimizing management and operational efficiency, as well as innovative tourism products and services. When the product or service quality experience is marvelous, customers will share their good experience on social media, attracting and encouraging more potential customers to choose the travel company. Ultimately, a high level of customer loyalty will be achieved.

In addition, social media marketing has both positive and negative impacts on the views of firms and customers from social and economic perspectives. The positive outweighs the negative impacts of social media marketing because it enhances brand image, sales revenue, visibility, market share, customer networking, engagement, and trend-setting. The tourism industry needs to consider market demand, competition, cost, and profitability to develop a price marketing strategy that suits its needs to achieve better marketing results and operational efficiency.

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