Research on the Internet Marketing of Rural Homestay—A Case Study of Lichuan City of Hubei Province

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Abstract. With the rapid development of Internet technology in China, Internet marketing has been widely used in various industries. As an important part of rural tourism, rural homestay is of great significance for the development of rural economy, the realization of accurate poverty alleviation and rural revitalization. With the strong support of the national policy, Internet marketing has provided a development opportunity for rural homestay. This paper has mainly used the method of statistical analysis, comparative research and case study to carry out the research, taking the Internet marketing of rural homestay as the theme, taking Lichuan’s homestay as an example, analyzed the opportunities and challenges of homestay Internet marketing, existing problems, and put forward the corresponding strategies in order to better meet the growing demand of people for rural homestay.

Introduction

With the rapid development of Internet technology in China, new changes have taken place in the way of information dissemination. The speed of information dissemination is faster and the channels of communication are wider. Under the strong support of the national policy, the network technology has been widely used in various industries, and the number of consumers using the Internet rapidly increasing. The rapid integration of Internet technology into various industries makes the Internet economy present a new trend of development, more and more people begin to join the Internet marketing. In recent years, due to the strong demand for urban residents’ returning to nature, rural tourism shows strong vitality and attraction, and no matter how good rural tourism products are, they also need to be marketed. The combination of Internet and rural tourism marketing is a new marketing mode. This new marketing mode is based on the Internet, it breaks through the traditional marketing in the high cost of marketing, the limitations of publicity dissemination, has created a new path for the rural tourism marketing. This article will take the Internet marketing of rural homestay as the theme, take Lichuan’s homestay as an example, explore the necessity, successful experience and existing problems of homestay Internet marketing, and put forward the corresponding strategies to these related problems, in order to better meet the growing demand of people for rural homestay.

Opportunities and Challenges Faced by Rural Homestay Internet Marketing

Opportunities for Rural Homestay Internet Marketing

(1)With the rapid development of Internet economy, the state has issued related policies to support rural homestay’s development. In 2017, the state has proposed to use Internet technology to publicize and market rural homestay products, and support the integration of rural leisure and vacation industry and rural tertiary industry. In 2018, the state has proposed to promote the upgrading of rural tourism quality and accelerate the commercialization of the fifth generation mobile communication technology (5G). (2)The progress of Internet technology has brought new development space to many industries. As of June 2018, the number of online shopping users in China has reached 569 million, an increase of 6.7 percent from the end of 2017, accounting for 71 percent of the total number of Internet users. This data fully shows that online shopping has become a development trend[1].With the help of
Internet marketing, rural homestay forms the combination of online and offline, multi-point marketing to make the dissemination of rural homestay information more widely and the brand effect more significant. (3) Rural homestay marketing innovation mainly depends on communication technology and computer technology. The internet big data analysis can provide accurate customer analysis for rural homestay marketing so as to make rural homestay user segmentation more accurate; The progress of Internet technology has changed the traditional marketing mode and is the main force to support the innovation of rural homestay marketing; and the progress of Internet technology has made the marketing cost of rural homestay lower, the effect of marketing better, and the feedback faster.

The Challenges Faced by Rural Homestay Internet Marketing

(1) The competition of rural homestay market has become extremely fierce because of Internet, the information on rural homestay has become more transparent through the Internet, the price of rural homestay has become open, and the development information of rural homestay has been rapidly disseminated by Internet. More outsiders see business opportunities, more potential competitors join homestay industry, homogenous rural homestay exist, thus aggravating the market competition.
(2) Although Internet marketing has reduced the cost of rural homestay marketing, it has also increased the complexity of marketing, mainly reflected in the following points: first, the speed of information update becomes faster. The marketing subject of homestay needs to pay close attention to the changes of Internet information in order to carry out timely marketing[2]; Second, Internet makes rural homestay marketing become homogeneous, many people follow the trend of imitating the marketing mode, marketing strategy innovation is more difficult; Thirdly, the difficulty of product innovation is increasing. With the improvement of consumers' individuation demand, the innovation requirements of rural homestay are higher and higher for consumers.

The Problems Existing in the Rural Homestay Internet Marketing of China

Rural Homestay Operators’ Awareness of Internet Marketing Is Weak

The weak awareness of Internet marketing of rural homestay operators is mainly reflected in the following three points: first, the old concept of marketing, the homestay marketing is still carried out according to the traditional way of thinking, mainly relying on the media, travel agencies, television and other channels[3]; The second is the lack of innovation in marketing mode, not innovating according to the characteristics of homestay marketing, blindly follow the existing Internet marketing methods for homestay marketing; The third is the lack of marketing management, the lack of understanding marketing management leads to marketing decentralization.

The Internet Marketing Dynamic of Rural Homestay Is Insufficient

Although many rural homestay operators have already used the Internet platform for publicity and marketing, they are also limited to websites, WeChat official accounts promotion, and less is involved in other means of Internet marketing. Mass consumers can only obtain rural homestay information through the traditional network platform with one-way search, the marketing dynamic is weak[4]. In addition, the operators are mainly individual marketing, there is no joint marketing, failing to give full play to the marketing advantages from the point to face.

The Internet Marketing of Rural Homestay Has A Low Customer Conversion Rate

The customers conversion rate of rural homestay Internet marketing is mainly composed of new customers and returning customers. The conversion rate of guest source is affected by the details page of homestay website, preferential activities of homestay Internet booking, homestay service and so on. From the content published on the marketing page of rural homestay website, homestay operators only publish some homestay advertisements and related traffic routes on the Internet platform, resulting in low user attention; Rural homestay operators only pay attention to hard generalization,
lack of interactive mechanism, low user activity; because of the above reasons, the conversion rate of rural homestay Internet marketing customers is not high.

Internet Marketing of Rural Homestay Lacks Characteristics

The lack of characteristics of rural homestay Internet marketing is caused by three aspects: first, the phenomenon of homogenization of rural homestay Internet marketing is serious, and the information publicized by rural homestay operators on the network, theme activities and other plate content and traditional media marketing content is very similar, homestay characteristics reveal degrees are not high. Second, rural homestay Internet marketing has not combined with local rural characteristics for marketing, conventional marketing forms have caused consumers’ aesthetic fatigue[5]. Third, rural homestay Internet marketing is not conducted on the basis of local characteristics according to the current hot spot marketing. Such as popular APP (such as quick worker APP, Jitter APP), Chinese popular variety shows “Dear Inn”, “beautiful House” and so on.

Case Study: Internet Marketing of Homestay in Lichuan City of Hubei Province

The Present Development Situation of Lichuan’s Homestay

By 2017, a total of 18 homestay demonstration villages had been built in Lichuan City, development homestay 1180 households, 6510 guest rooms and 12200 beds. In 2017, more than 2.5 million tourists were received in Lichuan, with a combined income of more than 800 million yuan. In a short period of three years, Lichuan’s homestay industry have radiated a strong vigor and vitality.

The Internet Marketing Model of Lichuan Homestay

The development of Lichuan's homestay can’t be separated from the promote role of Internet, Internet has also created favorable conditions for the marketing of Lichuan's homestay. Lichuan's homestay has the following four Internet marketing modes: (1) Internet TV marketing. Lichuan's homestay and CCTV cooperate to promote rural homestay so as to achieve the effect of marketing rural homestay through television programs. (2) Internet direct sales. Lichuan has opened the Lichuan's homestay website, consumers can directly browse the price of homestay, routes and surrounding attractions and tourism information from the website. (3) Middlemen marketing. Lichuan's homestay complete a series of pre-sale, in-sale, after-sale ecological chain services through Airbnb, Piglet short rent, Ant short hire and so on to carry on the C2C marketing mode, as well as the O2O+B2C innovation marketing mode. (4)Self-media marketing. Lichuan's homestay management subjects open WeChat official account for rural homestay marketing.

Influence Factors of Internet Marketing Effect of Lichuan’s Homestay

Rural homestay Internet marketing can be accurate marketing to achieve the purpose of marketing only by understanding the needs of consumers. Therefore, we chooses two representative online travel platforms on the Internet (Ctrip and Tongcheng) to investigate and analyze consumers’ satisfaction. The specific data analysis is as follows: as of May 2018, data showed that there were eight homestays in Lichuan, which have been searched through Ctrip, fromthree of which we did not see comments, five of which had a comment function, and from five of them we could see a total of 152 comments. According to the scoring standards of 0-1, 1.1-2.0, 2.1-3.0, 3.1-4.0 and 4.1-5.0, 152comments were statistically analyzed for consumer satisfaction. According to the statistics, the number of consumers with a score of 0-1 is 1, satisfaction accounts for 1%; 1.1-2.0 scores: 1, satisfaction accounts for 1%; 2.1-3.0 scores: 7, satisfaction accounts for 5%; 3.1-4.0 scores: 16, satisfaction accounts for 10%; 4.1-5.0:127, satisfaction accounts for 83%. Consumers’ satisfaction is shown in figure 4.1:
A total of 7 Lichuan’s homestays were searched on Tongcheng, among which 3 homestays were appraised, 4 homestays were not appraised and 3 homestays were appraised with 20 comments. According to the scoring criteria of 0-1, 1.1-2.0, 2.1-3.0, 3.1-4.0 and 4.1-5.0, the 20 comments were statistically analyzed for consumer satisfaction. According to the statistics, the number of consumers with a score of 0-1 is 2, satisfaction accounts for 10%; 1.1-2.0 scores: 3, satisfaction accounts for 15%; 2.1-3.0 scores: 2, satisfaction accounts for 10%; 3.1-4.0 scores: 6, satisfaction accounts for 30%; 4.1-5.0 scores: 7, satisfaction accounts for 35%. Consumers’ satisfaction is shown in figure 4.2 below:

Through the consumer satisfaction evaluation and analysis of two online travel platforms (Ctrip and Tongcheng), From the two platforms we can see a total of 172 comments. In the statistical analysis of 172 consumer comments, it was found that the focus of consumers’ comments was as follows: first, rural homestay services; The second is the accommodation infrastructure; the third is the price; the fourth is the transportation conditions; the fifth is the surrounding environment; the other is food, local characteristics and so on. Therefore, when carrying out rural homestay Internet marketing, we can carry out the marketing according to the key concerns of consumers.

Successful Experiences and Inadequacies of Lichuan’s Rural Homestay Internet Marketing

Successful Experiences of Lichuan’s Rural Homestay Internet Marketing

(1) The strong policy support of Lichuan city government as well as the media Internet propaganda. From 2015 to 2018, Lichuan government has issued a series of policies to support the development of homestay. At the same time, the local media has actively publicized Lichuan’s homestay through Internet, attracted a large number of tourists to Lichuan to travel, successfully promoted the local economic development. Through policy support and Internet promotion, Lichuan’s homestay has got substantial development. In 2017, Lichuan has received more than 10 million tourists, realizing a combined tourism revenue of 5.93 billion yuan, of which 1.018 million tourists were received by homestay and achieved a combined tourism revenue of 260 million yuan. (2) Lichuan’s rural homestay fully combines local characteristics to carry out Internet marketing. Lichuan is the main residence of Tujia nationality, Tujia nationality has a rich rural culture, distinctive ancient singing and dancing performances, stewed chicken with stone ears and other gourmet dishes, owning a
architectural style of self-formed stilted building and so on. In order to attract tourists to travel and stay here, local rural homestay operators have fully combined with the local culture of Tujia nationality and spread it out through Internet channels. (3)Lichuan's rural homestay adopts a variety of Internet marketing channels. Lichuan's homestay operators use a variety of internet channels to carry out rural homestay marketing, there is a large-scale tourism website which has detailed homestays, routes, scenic spots, play strategies, group purchase and other information. Tourists can query according to the information they need[6]; Lichuan's homestay information has been registered in a number of short-term rental platforms (Piglet short rent, Ant short rent, Tujia) and some tourism platforms (Ctrip, Tongcheng),consumers can directly conduct on-line booking on these platforms; Many Lichuan's homestay operators have opened the WeChat official account, the official account also has detailed homestay, strategy guide, scenic spots and other information.

The Deficiencies of Lichuan’s Rural Homestay Internet Marketing

(1) Lack of experiental marketing. No experiental marketing activities have been found for rural homestay, some travel websites and short-rent platform pages have only simple text explanation and pictures. Because of lacking experiental marketing, the effect of rural homestay Internet marketing has been affected, leading to the lack of attention to some rural homestays, or small sales volume, poor income. (2)Lack of innovation in Internet marketing and alliance marketing with other platforms. In the case of shrinking product differentiation, the marketing mode of Lichuan’s rural homestay also tends to assimilate. Rural homestay-related information has a single dissemination channel; Lichuan's rural homestays don’t use alliance marketing, all advertising effect multiplier effect isn’t ideal.

The Optimization Strategies of Rural Homestay Internet Marketing

Enhance Internet Marketing Awareness of Homestay Operators and Improve Operation and Management Level

In the information age, the development of rural homestay requires the operators to enhance the awareness of Internet marketing and improve the level of operation and management, which can be started from the following three points. The first is to carry out regular training courses on the operation and management of rural homestay, through the rich training content, let the homestay operators understand the importance of the deep integration of rural homestay industry and Internet, and improve their Internet marketing consciousness; The second is that homestay operators should take the homestay Internet marketing as the starting point, deeply excavate the connection between rural homestay and Internet marketing, and carry on the Internet marketing innovation in combination with the points that consumers like to pay attention to. The third is that the exchange and sharing of big data resources of the whole homestay industry should be realized through the establishment of a homestay big data platform, finally improving management level of rural homestay operators and service quality of rural homestay.

Increase Internet Publicity on Rural Homestay

Rural homestay operators can use WeChat, Weibo, Forum and other social platforms to promote rural homestay[7]. For example, using WeChat publicity can let consumers pay attention to the homestay WeChat official account, update the information in real time, and guide consumers to stay in; Using Weibo and Forum to do propaganda, making use of the high openness and extensive interaction between Weibo and Forum, publishing marketing information of rural homestay, enhancing the popularity of rural homestay; Using video software to advertise, shoot videos that can arouse consumers’ curiosity and bring value to them, so that consumers can share the video promotion with others and amplify the marketing effect.

Widening Internet Marketing Platform for Rural Homestay

The Internet marketing platform of rural homestay should be widen mainly in homestay website, tourism website, APP client and so on. The marketing website of rural homestay is firstly based on
the homestay website. For example, operators can choose Airbnb, Ant short rent, Tujia, Piglet short rent and other homestay short rent websites; secondly, they can also choose Ctrip website, Elong travel net, Tuniu, Tongcheng and other rural tourism websites; Finally, they can also use Sina Weibo, Today's headlines, Jitter and other APP clients to market homestay products.

Make Use of Internet to Strengthen the Characteristic Marketing of Rural Homestay

With the rapid development of rural homestay industry, it is necessary to strengthen the characteristic marketing of rural homestay according to the development trend of Internet[8]. Rural homestay operators should fully exploit local tourism resources and show their own folk custom characteristics according to individual needs of consumers. For example, Lichuan’s homestay can be designed to add the folk culture characteristics of Lichuan Tujia nationality, which can be publicized through Internet so that consumers can experience different Tujia homestays; Secondly, a healthy rural Tujia recipe should be designed with different samples for consumers in seven days a week, which can be made known to consumers through Internet and propaganda for rural homestay by satisfying the taste buds of consumers.

Innovate Rural Homestay Customer Management Model with Internet

Homestay operators should make use of Internet technology to coordinate the interaction of marketing and service between homestay and customers, so as to innovate the management mode of rural homestay and provide personalized interaction and service to customers. Because the Internet can not only provide customers with timely information, but also collect customers’ information, forming a fast and efficient two-way communication channel. From this point of view, rural homestay operators can design all aspects of online booking and offline consumption according to customers' needs, and transform some potential customers searched by Internet engine into rural homestay customers, so as to improve customers’ loyalty.

Apply Internet to Develop Rural Homestay Alliance Marketing

At present, the homestay of our country lacks a comprehensive alliance marketing platform, so it is easy for the single rural homestay to be restricted by the online travel platform and gradually marginalize in the competition process[9]. Therefore, in the context of Internet, the government should take the lead to set up an Internet platform to promote rural homestay, bringing together the existing systems of different homestay and creating the overall system of the rural homestay alliance, through the combination of online entrances and offline stores, this can break through the limitations of single rural homestays, form alliance-style marketing, and at the same time make up for the regional deficiencies of different homestays, and complete the promotion of marketing strategies of rural homestay, to realize the transformation and upgrading of homestay itself.

Conclusion

Rural homestay Internet marketing is a focal point that can activate rural economy, narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, promote the sustainable development of rural tourism, and promote the revitalization of rural areas. Although rural homestay get the ride of Internet development and the support of government policies, there are still some deficiencies in Internet marketing. This paper has expounded the current situation of rural homestay Internet marketing and analyzed the existing problems and reasons. Then, this paper has made an in-depth case study on rural homestay Internet marketing in Lichuan and summarized the successful experience of rural homestay Internet marketing in Lichuan. Finally, this paper has put forward the strategies of promoting rural homestay Internet marketing in order to better meet the growing demand of people for rural homestay.
References


