

Analysis of Mafengwo's Social Media Strategy

Jiaqi Wu

*School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management
 College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management
 University of South Carolina, Columbia
 Columbia, SC 2920, the United States
 jiaqiw@email.sc.edu*

ABSTRACT

Social media marketing is one of the marketing methods that is commonly used by companies. This paper takes one of China's most representative online travel agencies, Mafengwo, as an example, analyzes the construction and content of its social media platforms, and summarizes four marketing models: "multi-channel marketing," "anthropomorphic marketing," "social group marketing" and "content marketing." Based on these four marketing models, four marketing strategies: "occasion-based marketing," "precision marketing," "interactive marketing," and "retention marketing" are summarized. With this information, this paper intends to provide a reference for the social media marketing of Chinese online travel agencies. The key of Mafengwo's social media marketing is to manage the social media platform according to the company's human resources and maintain the content level and update frequency of its social media accounts. In addition, Mafengwo is successful in building customer loyalty through close interaction with users. These strategies could help companies reach the goal of social media marketing, which is to promote the company's valuable products and images.

Keywords: *online travel agency; social media; marketing strategy; Mafengwo*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are few international pieces of research on online travel agencies, mainly focusing on website serviceability, search engine marketing, and customer loyalty. For example, Albayrak et al. explored the relationship between the quality of online travel agency websites, hedonic value, and customer loyalty. They found that website quality affects hedonic value, which in turn affects loyalty [1]. In contrast, Chinese scholars have extensive research coverage of online travel agencies, including online user reviews, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, product development and innovation, and national policies. Currently, some scholars have researched the marketing models and strategies of typical online travel agencies in China. For example, Huang and Wu have conducted comparative studies on the marketing models of four representative travel websites in China and summarized four marketing models: word-of-mouth marketing, differentiated marketing, content marketing, and brand marketing [2].

Nowadays, with the increasing use of social media among the public, using social media to increase awareness and purchase behaviors has become a common marketing method for companies. Liu believes that social media marketing has high convenience, a wide range, and a good consumer development rate. It can also ensure sufficient human resources in the industry, improve the efficiency of communication between companies and consumers, and provides big data which shows the needs of consumers, so as to formulate targeted strategies [3].

After sorting out the relevant literature, it is found that the current research on online travel agency marketing lacks a subdivision of social media marketing. This paper sets out to address this research gap and use one of China's top online travel agencies, Mafengwo, as the object of study. The research will be conducted on Mafengwo's construction and content on social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and mobile APP. This paper will then analyze Mafengwo's main marketing models and strategies based on its advantages over competitors. The final purpose of the study is to provide a reference for the social media marketing of online travel agencies.

2. DEFINITION OF RELATED CONCEPTS

Online travel agencies can generally be divided into three categories: online travel service agents, travel information service providers, and UGC platforms. Travel service agents mainly provide online booking services of tourism products to consumers. Travel information service providers mainly provide consumers with information services such as real-time search of tourism product information and group purchase information. Finally, UGC platforms are for providing travel strategy information and also integrate social interactions [4]. The research object of this paper, Mafengwo, is a UGC-type online travel agency, and it is China's leading travel social platform. Thus, social media marketing is particularly important for its development.

Mafengwo carries out social media marketing on platform-based social media (Weibo), community-based social media (WeChat), tool-based social media (Mafengwo APP), and ubiquitous social media (Douyin) [5]. Since Mafengwo has multiple social media accounts with different names and different functions on Weibo and WeChat platforms, such as "Mafengwo Polaris Travel Guides," "Mafengwo How-to-play Research Institute," etc., to avoid confusion, this paper will choose the most important and comprehensive one, "Mafengwo Travel" as the research object.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING MODELS OF MAFENGWO

3.1. Multi-channel marketing

Nowadays, the advancement of digital technology allows companies to reach users through multiple channels. Accordingly, users have more choices in the purchase process. Therefore, companies must seize the opportunity to expose themselves to more users and attract users' attention as much as possible to strive for more substantial competitiveness in the market [6]. To stand out among the many online travel agencies in China, Mafengwo conducts multi-channel marketing on social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, and mobile APP.

3.1.1 Online platform marketing

Mafengwo started its Weibo account "Mafengwo Travel" in May 2010 and has been in operation ever since. As of August 2021, the account has posted 43,838 Weibo and has 3.31 million followers. The early Weibo content of "Mafengwo Travel" was mainly tourism-related pictures and simple text. However, it has been exploring and gradually forming a relatively standardized operation model over the past ten years.

Nowadays, "Mafengwo Travel" regularly updates six posts every day. The contents of Weibo are "Today's Top Travel Note," travel-related documentary recommendations, "Polaris Travel Guides," travel knowledge quiz (online poll), photo sharing, and "Bees' Bedtime Chat." The travel notes and travel guides are all from the Mafengwo APP, which can be regarded as official promotion, while the rest of the content is designed to attract the attention of Weibo users and activate its followers.

3.1.2 Online community marketing

WeChat is another social media platform used by Mafengwo. It places great emphasis on the close connection between people, making people develop online communities according to their own connections. As of August 2021, the official account of Mafengwo Travel has published a total of 1385 articles. In addition, the account maintains a frequency of updates five times a week. Most of the articles it published combine travel destinations with recent news. This way helps to trigger discussions among users and generate more clicks, likes, and reposts. In addition, Mafengwo uses WeChat Channels, Moments, and groups to assist its official account's social media marketing activities.

3.1.3 Mobile application marketing

Mafengwo APP is the official mobile application of Mafengwo. It is a platform for its users to post and search travel notes and travel guides. It also has certain social functions. The homepage has a "community activities" section, where users can post and reply to posts, meet travelers in the same city, and satisfy their social needs.

3.1.4 New social media marketing

Mafengwo released a series of short videos on Douyin on February 27, 2018, which is called "In 2018, Mafengwo Takes You to Rediscover the World." This is the first time its official account has published works on Douyin. As of August 2021, the account has posted 211 short videos and has 916,000 followers. It can be seen from the update frequency that Mafengwo does not use Douyin as a primary marketing platform but only uses it to expand the promotion of some official materials.

Different users have different social media usage habits. Therefore, online travel agencies carry out marketing activities on multiple social media to help companies expand the range of promotion, break the barrier of the theme restrictions, and reach more users who ignore travel content through their social media networks [7]. In this way, brand awareness can be enhanced.

3.2. Anthropomorphic marketing

Mafengfeng uses anthropomorphic marketing to create a lovely and down-to-earth brand image on social media platforms. For example, the "Mafengwo Travel" account on Weibo and WeChat interacts with users as "Wozhu" and calls its followers "Fengfeng." They also set up two official personal accounts on the WeChat platform, namely "Xiaoma's agent-Pangda" and "Xiaofeng's keeper-Beibei." These two accounts can communicate one-to-one with "Fengfeng" through Wechat Moments, groups, and private messages. Replacing brand names with nicknames can highlight brand personality and quickly narrow the distance between the brand and users. In addition, companies also gain users' love through the perception of user needs and social news [8]. For example, at the end of its article, the author often asks followers for the topic suggestions for the next time; when there are hot movies and dramas, the author will choose the shooting location as a tourist destination to recommend to followers. Mafengwo has gained a great advantage using an anthropomorphic marketing strategy. Compared with Ctrip, whose social media accounts do not have a human-like image, the clicks and comments of Mafengwo's article are significantly higher. Both companies published one article on their WeChat accounts on August 31, 2021. Mafengwo gained 66,000 clicks and 273 likes on that day, while Ctrip only gained 14,000 clicks and 27 likes.

3.3 Social group marketing

A brand's social group is a specialized community based on social relationships between consumers who use a certain brand. Companies can learn about product feedback from consumer interactions through social groups to obtain consumers' relevant needs in a more timely and effective manner and make quick improvements. It can also strengthen consumers' interactions with brands [9]. Mafengwo conducts social group activities on the three social media platforms, Weibo, WeChat, and mobile APP. Its Weibo account publishes the "Bees' Bedtime Chat" at around 10 pm every night, attracting fans to interact and chat in the comments through relaxing topics. Its WeChat official account includes three sections: "recommendation", "start now", and "discover more". The first section includes four parts of event companions, itinerary, travel notes, and destination selection. The second section includes the contents of booking tickets and hotels. The third section includes selected articles, live broadcasts, business cooperation, APP download, and other content. Users can obtain comprehensive information through this official account and can also interact with authors and other users. WeChat group QR codes are occasionally included in the official account articles. Users can join the group based on their

interests, join more refined communities, and participate in officially organized activities. For example, in the food-themed article published on March 23, 2021, the Food WeChat group QR code was attached to the end of the article, which attracted many followers to join the group to participate in the discussion. In the Mafengwo APP, users can search for travel destinations they are interested in, join a precisely divided interest community, and share experiences with other travelers. In addition, there are more refined community divisions such as the "Bee Leaders' Club", which is specially set up for top travelers. Finely segmented communities can push content based on users' interests to attract clicks, making marketing more efficient. In addition, segmented tags can enhance users' self-identity, bring users a sense of belonging, and thus keep the communities active.

3.4. Content marketing

A robust content production environment, characterized by optimizing the value of content perceived by customers and complying with standardized content quality standards, has a significant positive impact on the effectiveness of content marketing [10]. As China's leading UGC-type online travel agency, Mafengwo provides users with a platform to post their travel experiences and information on the Internet for others' reference. The user-generated content is often used in a company's social media marketing process. "Today's Top Travel Note," posted daily on Weibo, is a selection of high-quality works from numerous travel notes posted by users in the Mafengwo APP. This serves two purposes for both company and users. The company can obtain UGC content to enrich their marketing materials, and users can get recognition and satisfaction through official certification. In addition to the UGC content published on Weibo, Mafengwo also attracts users through high-quality original content published on the WeChat platform. To ensure high-quality content, all articles published on its WeChat public account are written by the company's professional staff. Each article has more than 10,000 views, and there are often hit ones. For example, the article about Changsha, the location of the hit drama "Sweeping Dark Storm," released on August 30, 2021, exceeded 100,000 views in just two days after its release. Since 2021, Mafengwo's Wechat Channel has maintained the update frequency of five videos a week. The video topics and the official account articles interact with each other to achieve mutual diversion. When a user follows a company's official accounts on multiple platforms, the user is more likely to see information posted by the company. As a result, companies are more likely to increase their reach rates.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGY OF MAFENGWO

4.1. Occasion-based marketing

Increasing social awareness with the help of popular news is one of the methods commonly used by companies in online marketing. Mafengwo often uses this marketing strategy on Weibo and WeChat platforms. For example, on August 30, 2021, Beijing Universal Resort officially announced its opening to the public on September 20, 2021. This news immediately triggered enthusiastic reactions on the Internet. Mafengwo used this tourism news to post relevant content on Weibo and WeChat, respectively. Through the video clips uploaded by users on Mafengwo App, Mafengwo simultaneously updated a series of short videos of "Beijing Universal Studios Real Shooting Guide" on its Weibo and WeChat Channel and has received a total of 666 likes. Its official WeChat account also updated an article about the news of Beijing Universal Studios on September 2 and received nearly 30,000 views in one day.

4.2. Precision marketing

When conducting social media marketing, companies will carefully choose the platform they use and produce content that fits the style of the platform. For example, Mafengwo posts Weibo in the form of short text with pictures or videos and posts its WeChat official accounts in the form of long articles with pictures. Its WeChat Channel mainly uploads one-minute short videos. These different content forms are formulated according to the platform's characteristics and conform to the habits and preferences of users of different platforms.

4.3. Interactive marketing

Mafengwo frequently interacts with users through social media accounts to maintain a loyal customer base and establish a positive and friendly brand image. For example, its official account often chats with followers in the comments of "Bees' Bedtime Chat" launched every night on Weibo and answers questions from users in the comments of WeChat articles.

4.4. Retention marketing

Companies can influence and change users' consumption habits through a series of marketing activities. If companies and users are well matched, then the users' loyalty can be improved [11]. The social media accounts of Mafengwo have a stable update schedule, for example, Weibo is updated six times daily, and WeChat accounts are updated five times per week. If things go on like this, users will get used to

seeing certain content at a fixed time at a fixed location and can selectively consume the content according to their needs.

5. CONCLUSION

The research results of social media marketing of Mafengwo can be summarized as follows:

First, Mafengwo has deployed its online marketing on multiple social media platforms to expand the scope of content distribution as much as possible. However, the marketing efforts of different platforms are different. For example, the official accounts are most active on Weibo and WeChat, and it is less active on other platforms such as Douyin. At the same time, Mafengwo publishes content in different forms and themes according to the characteristics of different social media to cater to the habits and preferences of users. Online travel agencies can arrange the operation of social media platforms according to their human resources and carry out social media marketing activities within the scope of their capabilities to ensure the quality of the official accounts.

Second, Mafengwo always pays great attention to the interaction with users to get close to users as much as possible. Whether it is to communicate with users on social media platforms in an anthropomorphic image or choose the theme of marketing content from real perceptions, it intends to increase user loyalty and favorability and enhance user stickiness.

Third, Mafengwo focuses on maintaining the level and update frequency of the content produced by its social media accounts. Although there are corresponding marketing strategies and output standards, they have been striving to innovate within the framework, constantly creating new content and planning new activities to maintain user engagement. If the marketing activities do not see results, they will change their routes and explore better marketing models.

This article also has certain limitations. The author only takes Mafengwo as the main research object, so the research object is relatively single. In the future, researchers can study multiple online travel agencies such as Ctrip, Fliggy, Tuniu, etc., for horizontal comparison. Therefore, researchers can summarize the differences in marketing strategies between different companies and the advantages and disadvantages and provide more comprehensive information on social media strategies for Chinese online travel agencies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Firstly, I would show my deepest gratitude to my university professors and research instructors, who have provided me with valuable guidance in every stage of

the writing of this thesis. I am also thankful for my previous supervisors, who have taught me useful information to make my view more practical. Further, I would like to thank all my friends and parents for their encouragement and support. Without all their enlightening instruction and impressive kindness, I could not have completed my thesis.

REFERENCES

- [1] Albayrak, T., Karasakal, S., Kocabulut, Ö., & Dursun, A. (2020). Customer Loyalty Towards Travel Agency Websites: The Role of Trust and Hedonic Value. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 21(1), 50–77. <https://doi-org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/10.1080/1528008X.2019.1619497>
- [2] Huang, Y., & Wu, P. (2019). Jiyu Yonghu Tiyan De Sida Dianxing Lvyou Wangzhan Yingxiao Moshi Bijiao Yanjiu [A Comparative Study of the Marketing Modes of Four Typical Tourism Websites Based on User Experience]. *Journal of Huanggang Normal University*, 41(04), 122-126. doi:CNKI:SUN:HGXB.0.2019-04-028.
- [3] Liu, B. (2021). Shejiao Meiti Yingxiao Dui Xiaofeizhe Xingwei De Yingxiang Yinsu Fenxi Yanjiu [Analysis and Research on the Influencing Factors of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Behavior]. *China-Arab States Science and Technology Forum*, 4(07), 32-34. doi:CNKI:SUN:ZAKJ.0.2021-07-009.
- [4] Guonei Zhuliu Zaixian Lvyou Pingtaide Jingpin Fenxi Baogao [Competitive product analysis report of Chinese mainstream online travel platforms]. (2019, September 17). Qidianla. Retrived September 4, 2021, from <https://t.qidianla/1172761.html>
- [5] Tan T., & Zhang Z. (2017). Woguo Shejiaomeiti De Xianzhuang Fazhan Yu Qushi [The status quo, development and trend of social media in China]. *Editorial Friend*, 41(01), 20-25. doi:10.13786/j.cnki.cn14-1066/g2.2017.01.003.
- [6] Yiyi Li, Ying Xie, & Zhiqiang (Eric) Zheng. (2019). Modeling Multichannel Advertising Attribution across Competitors. *MIS Quarterly*, 43(1), 263–286. <https://doi-org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/10.25300/MISQ/2019/14257>
- [7] Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles*. Oxford University Press.
- [8] Chenjie. (2017, December 8). Ruhe Xitongde Jinxing Nirenhua Yingxiao? [How to systematically carry out anthropomorphic marketing?]. Worshipm. <http://www.worshipm/operate/863462.html>
- [9] Lu, F. (2021). Pinpai Shequn Yingxiao Celue Fenxi [Analysis of Brand Community Marketing Strategy]. *Marketing Industry*, 10(29), 9-10. doi:CNKI:SUN:YXJI.0.2021-29-005.
- [10] Koob, C. (2021). Determinants of content marketing effectiveness: Conceptual framework and empirical findings from a managerial perspective. *PLoS ONE*, 16(4), 1–25. <https://doi-org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/10.1371/journal.pone.0249457>
- [11] Chiang, C.-T., Wei, C.-F., Parker, K. R., & Davey, B. (2017). Exploring the drivers of customer engagement behaviours in social network brand communities: towards a customer-learning model. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(17/18), 1443–1464. <https://doi-org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1399922>