

# Analysis of Chinese Hotel Social Media Strategies and Effectiveness on Xiaohongshu

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**Abstract.** Social media has played a crucial role in the era of Web3.0, and the past few years witness a rapid growth and development of Xiaohongshu app in China, which is a platform for sharing various information including fashion, travel, education, etc. While little research has been conducted in Xiaohongshu marketing of hotels in China, the purpose of this paper is to apply the Uses and Gratifications theory to explore current marketing strategies that frequently employed by hotels in China on Xiaohongshu, investigate the weaknesses and make recommendations. The study results have identified three commonly used marketing strategies, which are knowledge and photo sharing, lucky draw, and KOL and brand collaboration. The major drawback for Chinese hotels on Xiaohongshu is their replication of marketing materials on other platforms, not in line with the style of Xiaohongshu, and thus gain very low exposure. This study suggests hotels that leverages Xiaohongshu to conduct social media marketing to customize the content, follow the trending topics recommended by the official channel and enhance user engagement.

**Keywords:** Social media strategy, hospitality marketing, influencer marketing.

## 1. Introduction

Web 2.0 witnessed the explosive growth of social media platforms. According to Statista, the world's largest social media market is found in China, with a large proportion of mobile-savvy users [1]. In 2022, there were 1.03 billion active users in China, contributing to 72% social media penetration rate [2]. As indicated by Denizci et al., hotel social media marketing is different from traditional media marketing regarding the interactive environment, and thus a few innovative marketing strategies have surfaced to satisfy the new technology [3].

Established in Shanghai in 2013, Xiaohongshu have been attracting Chinese Gen Z because of its authentic and user generated content, covering from cosmetics, fashion to travel, education, and other personal experiences [4]. The young and dynamic platform is rapidly expanding. Until May 2023, there were more than 174 million monthly active users on Xiaohongshu according to Statista [5]. The platform has gathered a group of young women with strong purchasing power, and over 90% of its users will search on Xiaohongshu before making their purchase decisions [3, 6].

Leadleo reports that leveraging Xiaohongshu to search travel information has become one of the major reasons for the app users [6]. In 2021, there were 65.7% travel users using Xiaohongshu to look for hotels [6]. For this reason, conducting flexible digital marketing on Xiaohongshu is deemed effective for hospitality industry to attract customers. Xiaohongshu is also considered possessing high level of significance and considerable potential for development by some scholars [3]. Therefore, this paper will analyze hotels' social media marketing strategies on Xiaohongshu in China.

While a few prior studies have examined the marketing effectiveness for hospitality industry, they have mainly focused on analyzing the social media in general, or comparison among different platforms. For instance, research has explored the marketing of social media for well-known hotel businesses in China among the most frequently used social media platforms including Weibo and WeChat, and social media development in Hong Kong hotel industry, mainly focusing on Twitter, Facebook and Youtube [3,7]. Meanwhile, others examine the online marketing strategies based on the classification of hotels online marketing strategies in luxury hotels, studying the significance of social media marketing in the context of luxury hotels and boutique hotels [8, 9].

However, these studies become less relevant because of the rapid evolvement of social media and internet technology. Furthermore, since Xiaohongshu is established later than other Chinese major social media platforms, there has not been a specific investigation into the marketing strategies and their effectiveness of Xiaohongshu for hotels in China. Besides, Denizci et al. emphasizes that hotels should cherish the opportunity of social media marketing, because China has a high potential to become the largest hotel social media marketing market globally [3]. Therefore, the first objective of this research focuses on investigating the marketing approaches that hotels in China adopt and examining their effectiveness derived from the Uses and Gratification Theory. Additionally, the study aims to explore the major weaknesses in Xiaohongshu marketing for hotels in China. Last, the paper intends to provide recommendations for hotels in China to conduct Xiaohongshu marketing effectively, referring to successful examples in other industries.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Social Media Marketing in Hotels**

Ample research has been performed to analyze the realm of social media marketing within the hotel industry. Stressed by Varkaris and Neuhofer, hotels are beneficial to utilize social media with the changing and competitive market environment [10]. Another research also finds that active involvement of customer in brand-oriented activities on social media platform can help companies build a robust and enduring relationship with customers, which can in turn enhance customers' purchase intention [11]. Garg and Kumar [9] investigate in the social media effects towards customer purchase intention specifically in boutique hotels. The results indicate that social media impacts can be enormous on customer intent to purchase through two mediators, which are perceived usefulness and perceived trust [9]. Meanwhile, they suggest that both the celebrity effects and electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) have a favorable correlation with the perceived trust [9]. The e-WOM contents including pictures, texts, videos posted on social media can enhance customers perceived usefulness [9].

Scholars also discovered some weaknesses and challenges in hotel social media marketing. For instance, Denizci et al. finds that many Chinese hotels still simply regard social media platforms as places for publication, without paying attention to the uniqueness of each platform [3]. Therefore, hotels are advised to figure out the difference among several social media platforms, arranging specific marketing materials that cater to the target audience on each platform. Also, both Dimitrios et al. and Garg and Kumar underlined the importance of e-WOM and mentioned that hotels should focus on customers' comments and reviews on social media [8,9]. Solving guests' complaints and recovering service failures properly in time would increase the hotels' reputation as well [9].

### **2.2. Social Media Marketing Theories**

#### **2.2.1. 6I Social media monitoring framework**

The 6I Social Media Monitoring Framework is one of the methods applied to assess social media marketing's efficacy. Stevenson and Hamill have proposed that the 6I model consists of Impact, Involvement, Interaction, Influence and Intimacy [12]. This framework proves its advantages by acknowledging the intricate nature of marketing on social media and considering the most recent aspects in marketing [3].

#### **2.2.2. The uses and gratifications theory**

While previous theories have largely taken the perspective of social media posters, positing that media needs to persuade audiences. However, the Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G theory) contends that media activities should meet specific audience needs. The U&G theory first emerged in the 1940s with the aim of exploring the relationship between mass media and their audiences [13]. According to the scholars, uses and gratifications can be divided into 5 divisions based on types of individuals' needs, which are cognitive needs, affective needs, integration and social interaction,

personal identity, and escapism [14]. Cognitive needs refer to acquisition of knowledge and information, while affective needs mean “aesthetic and emotional experiences” [14]. The needs of self-confidence, social status and respect explain personal identity needs [14]. Integration and social interaction need require relationship maintenance such as family and friendships, and escapism serves a tool for relaxation and escape from stress and unpleasantness [14]. Quan-Haase argues that despite its age, the U&G theory remains relevant and influential in the digital era, as this methodology helps us understand the motivations behind internet users when liking and disliking any content [13].

This paper will employ the U&G theory to analyze the marketing tactics of Chinese hotels on Xiaohongshu, as this theory is based on user needs, which is crucial in social media operations. The 6I model, on the other hand, poses certain challenges in data collection as the data to be analyzed, such as post views and fan growth, belonging to internal data. Therefore, this paper will adopt the former theory for analysis.

### **3. Analysis of Strategies**

#### **3.1. Strategy 1: Knowledge & Photo Sharing**

First commonly applied marketing strategy for Chinese hotels on Xiaohongshu is information sharing, including sharing of knowledge and photos. Knowledge sharing typical contains travel guides and highlights local city activities. For instance, Chongming Island off-peak travel guide posted by Hyatt Regency Chongming introduces travel itinerary, tickets, and photography tips to guests, which have attracted more than 6,000 likes and saves. This method is particularly applicable to tourist cities or resort hotels. Other hotels also released guides for tasting wine, how to make cocktails and background information about their ingredients. According to the U&G theory, the popularity of knowledge sharing can be attributed to its alignment with users' cognitive needs, since it enables them to acquire desired knowledge.

In addition to knowledge sharing, photo sharing is preferred by Xiaohongshu users, which is related to affective needs in the U&G theory, since exquisite photos help to enhance aesthetic experience and can also serve as a way of escape. Some hotel accounts, such as Park Hyatt Beijing, post photos of artworks in their hotels and magnificent views from the hotels' upper floors. Besides, videos are regarded more easier to draw users' attention, and hotel videos about wedding and food tend to have more interactions.

#### **3.2. Strategy 2: Lucky Draw**

Lucky draw is another frequently employed strategy by hotels when in the realm of social media marketing. There are two types of lucky draw: Lucky draws with conditions and without conditions. Usually, lucky draws with conditions require hotel guests to share their hotel stay experience on Xiaohongshu, sometimes with special tags. For example, Park Hyatt Shenzhen held a lucky draw event call “Mark Your Park Moment”, requiring Xiaohongshu users to post their photos and stay experience with the tag “#MarkYourParkMoment”. Comparing to the latter approach of lucky draw, this kind of lucky draw can help hotels gain greater social media exposure while appreciating followers. Regarding the luck draws without conditions, hotels set dining coupons (e.g., Hilton Haikou), cosmetics (JW Marriott Haitang Bay Resort & Spa Hotel) and some customized products such as “Hyatt Monopoly” by Park Hyatt Guangzhou.

#### **3.3. Strategy 3: KOL & Brand Collaboration**

Plus, hotels proactively engage in collaborations with stars, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and other brands on Xiaohongshu as well. A notable example is the JW Marriott Haitang Bay Resort & Spa Hotel, which hosted a wedding for an NBA star and marketed on Xiaohongshu inviting consumers to hold a same wedding. Numerous KOLs visited the hotel restaurant and took aesthetically pleasing photos of the food and scenery, appealing to Xiaohongshu users who have the aspiration to achieve similar beauty, fortune, or influence.

In the U&G theory, this phenomenon might be interpreted as a manifestation of individual's aspiration to satisfy the personal identity needs, as they seek to learn from and compare themselves to admired figures.

#### 4. Challenges

Similar as what Denizci et al. have discovered, the major problem faced by hotels in China conducting Xiaohongshu marketing is still the direct copy of marketing materials from other platforms, which is often not in line with the platform style and tone [3]. This situation happens a lot in many chained or international hotels. Taking the officially certified Four Seasons hotel accounts in China as an example, there are very few Little Red Book likes and fans for the Four Seasons hotels in Tianjin, Beijing, and Shenzhen. Their content is usually a direct copy of large paragraphs of text with declarative sentences in the title and lack of highlights. Four Seasons Guangzhou, on the other hand, consciously uses emoji and platform language, and the title phrases are more relevant to the needs of young people, so the interaction and followers are higher than the other three Four Seasons. However, most articles of Four Seasons Guangzhou also contain only minor changes, and thus the overall promotion is not ideal. Only 3 posts out of 30 most recent ones have received some popularity and gained over 1,500 likes, while the others' average is less than 24 likes each. Some hotels even post their promotional posters directly on Xiaohongshu without adjusting the format. For example, Hyatt Regency Shanghai Universal Harbour publish its posters with QR code, which is forbidden by Xiaohongshu and would highly restrict the post exposure.

Additionally, the interaction frequency between hotels and their followers on Xiaohongshu is generally low, and a significant reason for this is that businesses tend to directly replicate pictures and wordings from other platforms, without actively seeking measures to encourage fan engagement. Despite having a large fan base, certain hotel posts continue to receive minimal likes and comments regarding individual post interaction. For instance, Le Méridien Beach Resort & Spa Hotel in Shimei Bay have accumulated over 18,000 followers, while likes for a single post usually did not exceed 10.

#### 5. Suggestions

After evaluating the marketing strategies of hotels in China on Xiaohongshu, four recommendations are proposed. First, hotels are advised to adjust the format and style of the marketing materials before uploading to Xiaohongshu. For instance, more emojis and shorter sentences are preferred by Xiaohongshu users. Also, a creative headline can draw more people's attention, instead of a statement sentence. McDonald's successfully executed this strategy with great proficiency, involving "monthly fortune", ChatGPT and other homophonic expressions, and accumulating over 295,000 fans on Xiaohongshu. Meanwhile, the official account of Xiaohongshu occasionally suggests topics that can drive extra traffic to a post. Burberry closely follows these topics and shared "summer travel" and "one photo challenge", etc. Additionally, improving user engagement is imperative, which can be achieved by encouraging users to comment their experiences, ideas, or suggestions. Luckin Coffee, a Chinese chained coffee shop, invited customers to vote for the products and answer some product matching questions. According to the U&G theory, interactions can help users gain empathy and form certain relationships with the brand [14]. Finally, as live-streaming e-commerce has become popular, hotels can explore live-streaming to acquire greater exposure in front of consumers and promote specific products such as mooncakes and dining coupons through the platform.

#### 6. Conclusion

There is still significant room for improvement in the operation of Chinese hotels' Xiaohongshu accounts, while the performance of many international hotel chains in China on the platform falls short of expectations. Although some strategies, such as sharing of information and photos,

conduction of lucky draws, and collaboration with other brands or KOLs, have been applied to attract followers and gained great traffic, hotels are still at the primary to development stage in Xiaohongshu marketing compared to some brands in retail and luxury industries. Since these accounts post marketing materials which are not in line with the platform style and acquire low interactions, hotels conducting Xiaohongshu marketing are highly recommended to customize the content and headlines when posting on Xiaohongshu, follow the trending topics recommended by the official channel and enhance user engagement. Besides, they could experiment live streaming on this platform and promote specific products through this way.

This paper has discovered several existing strategies of hotel Xiaohongshu marketing in China, while also make recommendations to the improvement of the effectiveness on Xiaohongshu marketing. This study serves as a guide to hotels who are seeking for suggestions of developing Xiaohongshu official account for promotion and maintaining relationships with customers, and thus assist them attract and retain more customers and generate higher revenue. There are several limitations in this study. First, the U&G theory has faced criticism since the data was collected from quantitative ways, not allowing diverse answers to the questions. This led to insufficient categories of reasons as to why marketing captures individuals' attention. For example, the second strategy mentioned above, lucky draw events, cannot directly be categorized into any kinds of needs outlined in the U&G theory. Second, this study does not apply quantitative methods, indicating that there can exist some degree of subjectiveness of the strategies and their effectiveness. Eventually, only a few of the international hotels have been examined, which may result in biases when analyzing the entire performance. Future research can be conduct in examining the effectiveness of various marketing strategies of hotels on Xiaohongshu using quantitative approach. In addition, different types of hotels can be categorized, analyzed, and compared about their marketing uniqueness and effectiveness on Xiaohongshu.

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