

The Impact of Social Media Marketing Campaigns on Tourist Growth and Consumption Patterns in Chongqing

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Abstract: The research examines the impact of social media marketing on the incremental growth and consumption patterns of tourists in Chongqing through a questionnaire survey. The study reveals that social media substantially enhances tourist influx, with visual symbols prompting immediate decision-making and cultural interpretations fostering long-term cognition; additionally, the consumption structure is defined by an "experience-first" approach. The research further confirms the relationship between content format and behavioral inclinations. The study recommends distinct platform strategies, including enhancing the placement of iconic scenes in short videos and enriching cultural exploration content on graphic platforms, while also acknowledging the limitations posed by geographic concentration in the sample and the use of cross-sectional data. This study offers a theoretical and practical foundation for the integration of cultural tourism and precision marketing in Chongqing, addressing the research gap on the quantitative attribution of regional tourism growth and the transformative impact of cultural symbols.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as an essential instrument for marketing tourism destinations in the digital age, owing to its robust communicative capabilities and significant engagement. Current studies emphasize communication mechanisms and traffic conversion. For instance, P. Wang et al. (2022) demonstrated that the appeal of information affects users' decision-making via the mediation of perceived value, grounded in the technology acceptance model. Xu et al. (2023) discovered that TikTok's push mode had hindered decision-making readiness while enhancing tourism behavior. Additionally, Wen et al. (2025) uncovered the chain mediation effect of emotional connections within virtual communities on the willingness to engage in check-ins, based on the theory of interactive ritual chains. Nonetheless, substantial deficiencies persist in regional tourism research: firstly, there is a lack of quantitative attribution analysis regarding the increase in tourist arrivals in specific regions, with current literature predominantly relying on qualitative assessments and lacking empirical validation of social media's influence; secondly, there is an absence of systematic examination of the moderating impact of marketing

campaigns on consumption patterns (e.g., the Distribution of expenditures on food and beverage, lodging, and shopping); and thirdly, the tangible transformative effect of cultural symbols on the rise in tourist arrivals in specific regions remains unquantified. As a quintessential example of Netroots tourism cities, Chongqing offers a perfect experimental context for this study because of its three-dimensional spatial configuration and distinctive cultural symbols. This study seeks to elucidate the impact of social media marketing on the expansion of tourism and consumption patterns in Chongqing while also validating the economic transformation effects of cultural symbols through quantitative analysis and empirical data. This study's conclusions offer strategic support for the sustainable development of regional tourism and enhance the theoretical framework of "experience economy"-focused destination marketing.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The ongoing research of social media and the emergence of social media-driven tourist destinations emphasizes the following elements:

2.1 Communication Mechanism and Traffic Transformation of Social Media-Driven Tourist Destinations

2.1.1 The Crucial Function of Short Video and Content Marketing

P. Wang et al. (2022) developed a novel media marketing tourism decision-making model grounded in the six-degree segmentation theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). They employed structural equation modeling to confirm that information attractiveness, information interactivity, and user trust significantly and positively influence user-perceived value, which positively impacts user decision-making. The subsequent study employed the Bootstrap method to examine the mediating effect, revealing that user-perceived value partially mediated the influence of information attractiveness on user decision-making (Path 1: information attractiveness → user-perceived value → user decision-making) and fully mediated the influence of information interactivity on user decision-making (Path 2: information interactivity → user-perceived value → user decision-making). Additionally, user-perceived value exerted a positive influence on user decision-making. It serves as a complete mediator in the relationship between user trust level and user decision-making (Path 3: user trust level → user perceived value → user decision-making). The study's limitations encompass a sample concentrated on a sample of college students and female demographics, the cross-sectional data's inability to monitor dynamic decision-making, and the model's exclusion of external variables (e.g., economic capacity). It is advised that new media platforms, such as Xiaohongshu, augment information appeal, bolster information interaction, cultivate user trust, and prioritize users' perceived value.

Utilizing the theory of planned behavior, Xu et al. (2023) developed a four-stage model of travel decision-making for TikTok users, encompassing motivation generation, decision preparation, decision generation, and decision perception. They employed an ordered Logit model to examine the influence of TikTok's attributes (push mode, information channels, etc.) and individual perceptions (interests, preferences, etc.). The research indicated that high-frequency pushing impeded decision preparation, information conduits facilitated travel behavior, curiosity stimulated decision production, and extensive knowledge restrained followers' engagement. The study's drawbacks encompass the

focus on young demographics and the Guilin region, the cross-sectional data's incapacity to monitor dynamic decision-making, and the model's restricted capacity to elucidate nonlinear correlations.

2.1.2 Emotionally Motivated and Digital Community Engagement

J. Wang et al. (2024) examined the influence mechanism of social media content marketing on tourists' travel intentions by developing a theoretical framework grounded in narrative communication theory and the Pleasure-Awakening-Dominance (PAD) model and conducted an empirical analysis of 300 valid questionnaires using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The key principles of the study encompass narrative communication (immersive narrative experience), arousal (emotional activation), dominance (perceptual control) within the PAD model, and distance desire (psychological distance management). The study's results indicate that narrative communication has a direct positive effect on travel intention and indirectly enhances travel intention through the mediation of arousal and dominance. Additionally, the desire for distance negatively moderates the influence of dominance on travel intention but not on arousal. The results offer theoretical backing for destination marketing strategies that focus on eliciting emotional and perceptual regulation via story content and optimizing distance perception to increase tourists' travel inclination.

Wen et al. (2025) employed 424 valid surveys to examine the influence mechanism of interactions within virtual communities on the propensity to visit tourist places promoted by social media, based on the chain theory of interaction rituals. The research developed a chain mediation model comprising "virtual community interaction - interpersonal susceptibility - empathy - willingness to engage," employing a 6-point Likert scale for variable measurement. The principal concepts encompass interaction ritual chain theory (which highlights the collective energy generated by shared concerns and emotional exchanges in virtual interactions), interpersonal susceptibility (the propensity of individuals to acquiesce to group opinions), and empathy (the phenomenon of experiencing emotional resonance within a group). Data analysis indicated that interactions within virtual communities directly and favorably influenced the willingness to engage while enhancing this willingness indirectly through the separate and chain-mediated effects of interpersonal susceptibility and empathy, thereby

verifying the emotion-driven process. The findings offer guidance for destination management: the emotional bond of virtual community interaction must be reinforced, interpersonal susceptibility should be augmented through the influence of opinion leaders and other strategies, and empathy needs to be fostered via cultural symbol design to sustain User-Generated-Content (UGC)-driven Engagement Persistence.

2.1.3 Dimensions of Information Evaluation and Tourist Decision-Making

Li and Zhang (2013) administered 600 surveys at the Jiuzhaigou Scenic Area, Sichuan, utilizing an on-site convenience sample method. The research developed an online information assessment model grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), delineated three dimensions of information quality (objectivity, completeness, and trustworthiness), information channel (accessibility, security, etc.), and information expression (vividness, clarity, etc.), and quantified tourists' evaluations via a five-point Likert scale while investigating their impacts on information engagement and tourism decision-making through structural equation modeling. The results showed that the evaluation of information expression had a significant positive effect on information participation and tourism decision-making, the evaluation of information quality had a direct effect on tourism decision-making, while the evaluation of information channels had no significant effect on information participation and decision-making; there were strong correlations between the evaluation dimensions (e.g., information channels were correlated with information quality). Limitations of the study include that the sample was concentrated on Jiuzhaigou tourists (geographical limitation), the data were cross-sectional and could not track the dynamic decision-making process, and the role of information channels in a multichannel environment (e.g., offline information sources) was not considered, so it is recommended that future studies expand the diversity of the sample, incorporate dynamic tracking methods, and the interaction effect of multiple information channels.

2.1.4 Trust Mechanisms and User Behavioral Intent

Han and Ming (2021) acquired research data via interviews and interactive communications within online communities. Utilizing the social cognitive theory framework of "belief-attitude-behavior," they developed a model elucidating the influence

mechanism of TikTok short videos on tourism behavioral intention, examining three dimensions: the information publisher, the receiver, and the interrelationship between the two. They unveiled the mediating pathways of cognitive and emotional trust through qualitative analysis. The mediating pathway of affective trust. The research revealed that the professionalism of opinion leaders, users' self-consistency (alignment of interests and values), and functional consistency (authenticity of the context) indirectly influenced tourism behavioral intention via cognitive trust (rational evaluation) and affective trust (emotional reliance), with affective trust serving as a complete mediator between relationship strength and behavioral intention. The study's limitations encompass an unspecified sample size, a data source concentrated on particular user demographics (e.g., college students, tourism professionals) from 2019-2020, an absence of extensive statistical validation and longitudinal tracking data, and the neglect of the moderating effects of external variables, such as economic capacity and geographic proximity, on behavioral intention. The TikTok platform should fortify its opinion leader development mechanism, refine the algorithm to improve video authenticity and immersive experiences, and deepen emotional trust through enhanced user interaction while creating distinctive tourism intellectual properties by integrating regional cultural attributes to augment the efficacy of new media marketing.

2.2 Optimization of Tourist Behavior and Experience

Liu (2023) primarily used literature analysis and theoretical deduction to elucidate the connotation, characteristics, and applications of new media marketing within the tourism sector, while proposing strategic recommendations aligned with integrated marketing theory. The argumentation process is segmented into three components: first, it delineates the fundamental characteristics of new media marketing (such as high efficiency, effectiveness, and interactivity) and its applications in tourism (including network platforms, mobile terminals, and outdoor media); second, it evaluates the current landscape through statistical data, highlighting issues such as superficial comprehension, fragmented planning, inadequate interaction, and deficient operational capabilities at existing tourist sites; finally, drawing upon integrated marketing theory and the 4C marketing mix (consumer, cost, convenience, communication), the study recommends strategies for enhancing marketing

awareness, systematic planning, fostering interaction, and bolstering operational proficiency. This study is limited by the absence of empirical validation, as the proposed strategies predominantly depend on theoretical reasoning and existing data without assessing their efficacy through real-world examples or experiments. The study offers a theoretical strategic framework for tourist attractions, highlighting that "tourist-centered" integrated marketing is fundamental to enhancing competitiveness. It outlines a method for attractions to reconcile market orientation with tourists' needs, though it requires further optimization with practical application.

Liang (2024) employed a synthesis of theoretical analysis and case-based empirical evidence to investigate the influence of social media marketing on visitors' destination choice preferences. The research primarily employs a descriptive design to examine the significance of social media within the tourism sector, the various marketing strategies (such as the promotion of official accounts, collaboration with travelers, and user-generated content), the effects on tourists' decisions (including heightened awareness, increased appeal, influence on decision-making, and fulfillment of personalized requirements), as well as the five predominant contemporary challenges (misinformation, privacy and security concerns, marketing homogenization, inadequate interaction, and subpar data analysis). The research illustrates the influence of social media marketing on tourists' decision-making by examining case studies of prominent scenic locations in China, such as Lijiang in Yunnan, Jiuzhaigou, West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhangjiajie, and Wuzhen, alongside the operational strategies of various social media platforms, including Weibo, TikTok, and WeChat. The study recommends strategies to enhance the tourist experience at scenic locations by addressing five primary issues. It underscores the necessity for social media marketing to consistently evolve in response to the dynamic market landscape, ensuring competitiveness through technological integration (e.g., AI recommendations, blockchain security) and media innovation (e.g., short videos, social e-commerce). This study offers a theoretical framework and practical approach for the digital transformation of tourist attractions, promoting a sustainable, user-centered, and data-driven marketing paradigm.

2.3 Dynamic Formulation of Tourism Destination Imagery and Data-Driven Marketing Strategies

Wang et al. (2021) assembled a research sample by gathering User-Generated Content (UGC) related to tourism from Jiuzhaigou National Park in China. The research revealed that tourists prioritize psychological perception, overall landscape, and universal imagery during the mid-stage of their journey, subsequently shifting to functional evaluation, attribute emphasis, and uniqueness recognition in the later phase. User-perceived value serves as an intermediary in the transformation of the image; for instance, the psychological theme is synthesized through the overall subjective feeling in the latter stage, while the significance of the functional theme markedly escalates. The significance of utilitarian themes has markedly escalated. The study's limitations encompass the emphasis on natural landscape destinations (characterized by distinct borders and activity patterns), the dependence on textual analysis of the data, potentially resulting in superficiality, and the absence of monitoring the evolution of the organic picture throughout the pre-trip phase. The research indicates that destination managers ought to evaluate the panoramic Tourism Destination Image (TDI) through socio-perceptual methodologies, employ targeted marketing to cater to individual tourist variances and augment the perceived value for tourists by improving the acknowledgment of functional attributes and refining distinctive symbolic representations.

Asuncion Beerli and Josefa D. Martin (2024) developed a destination image development model utilizing information source theory and a framework of personal attributes. The study revealed that induced information sources (solely travel agency recommendations) significantly and positively influenced perceptions of sunny beaches; autonomous information sources (such as travel guides) markedly improved perceptions of natural and cultural resources but diminished evaluations of the atmosphere; and organic information sources (recommendations from friends and family) adversely impacted perceptions of the social environment. Additionally, the Frequency of first-time tourists' visits to attractions significantly enhanced perceptions of natural and cultural resources, whereas repeat visits negatively influenced evaluations of the social environment. Furthermore, motivations for leisure, relaxation, and knowledge acquisition significantly propelled affective imagery,

while knowledge motivation among repeat visitors had an adverse effect. The study's limitations encompass a cross-sectional design that precludes observing the image's dynamic evolution, a restriction in questionnaire length that omits psychometric variables (e.g., values), and conclusions that predominantly pertain to island-type "sunny beach" destinations. Tourism management agencies should enhance collaboration among travel agencies to improve the Distribution of essential resources, align media content with the authentic representation of the destination, and fulfill the knowledge-seeking requirements of returning visitors through various tourism products.

2.4 Limitations of Existing Research

The existing research on the drivers of tourism growth in Chongqing exhibits three notable limitations. Firstly, studies primarily conduct qualitative analyses of the communication mechanism and lack quantitative attribution regarding the increase in tourism in Chongqing. Secondly, current research has not elucidated how marketing campaigns alter the composition of tourist expenditure (e.g., the percentages allocated to food and beverage, accommodation, and retail). Thirdly, current research has not measured the tangible impact of Bayu cultural symbols (e.g., hot pot) on the increase in tourist arrivals.

3 METHOD

3.1 Questionnaire Design

3.1.1 Description of Variables

Based on the relevant literature and the structure of the questionnaire, the core variables and corresponding question items were extracted:

Table 1. Definition of Research Variables and Corresponding Measurement Items.

Variant	Define	Corresponding item
Information Appeal	How intuitively appealing social media content is to users	Q4 Hot Word Exposure, Q7 Content Characterization Preferences

Information Interactivity	Intensity of user interaction with information from the platform/other users	Q8 active search platforms, Q9 passive reception channels
User Trust	Users' perceived trust in the authenticity of platform information	Q12 Access to information, Q13 Reach, Q21 Credibility
Perceived Value	Users' subjective evaluation of the usefulness of travel information	Q14 Reasons for attraction selection (culture/social media influencer /avoiding crowds)
Consumer Decision	The Specific Impact of Social Media on Travel Behavior	Q18 Change in consumption patterns, Q19 Willingness to revisit

3.1.2 Design of Scales

A 5-point Likert scale was used with specific correspondences:

Table 2. Scale Design for Variable Measurement.

Variant	Measurement question items (example)	Title Number
Information Appeal	"The photo templates of internet celebrities on social media prompted me to choose scenery."	Q4, Q7
Information Interactivity	"I will review travel recommendations based on friends' alerts or trending lists."	Q8,Q9, Q13
User Trust	"I think vegetarian punch notes are more credible than KOL-	Q12,Q21

	promoted content."	
Perceived Value	"The main reason I chose the attraction was cultural uniqueness/the same experience as social media influencer" (1=not important, 5=extremely important)	Q14
Consumer Decision	"I will extend my stay to experience new scenarios due to social media recommendations."	Q18, Q19

3.2 Data Sources and Processing

3.2.1 Data Sources

Regarding demographic characteristics, the questionnaire covers items Q1 to Q3, collecting foundational data on respondents' residential locations, age ranges, and arrival timelines. Behavioral patterns analysis employs questions Q5 through Q11 to examine travel purposes and digital platform usage frequency. The study utilizes items Q12 to Q21 for decision-making drivers to map information acquisition channels, expenditure allocations, and motivational factors influencing travel choices.

3.2.2 Data Processing

SPSS: assessment of reliability and validity (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$)

4 RESULT

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

4.1.1 Characteristics of Sample Population

Regarding age distribution, approximately 82% of respondents are aged 18–35 (option "1" representing the youth group), while 16% belong to the 36–50 age range (option "2"). Regarding geographical origins, Sichuan Province accounts for 34% of visitors,

followed by Hunan Province (18%) and Guangdong Province (12%), reflecting that tourists from neighboring provinces form the primary visitor base. For consumption patterns, food and beverage expenditures comprise the largest share of average spending at 38%, with accommodation costs ranking second at 25%, followed by transportation expenses (22%) and shopping expenditures (15%). These findings collectively outline the tourist population's core characteristics and spending preferences.

4.1.2 Frequency of Use of Social Media Platforms

Regarding active search platforms, TikTok emerges as the most prominent choice, used by 62% of users, followed by Xiaohongshu at 41% and WeChat at 38%. For passive recommendation platforms, TikTok also dominates with 58% adoption, while WeChat accounts for 32% and Bilibili (B Station) represents 24% of user engagement. These patterns underscore TikTok's dual role across both proactive and algorithm-driven content discovery, while platforms like Xiaohongshu and Bilibili reflect niche preferences in specific user segments.

4.1.3 Tools and Reasons for Choice

The data analysis uses Excel pivot tables to summarize percentages and employs SPSS frequency analysis to verify distribution uniformity and test differences. The rationale for selecting these tools relates to their ability to visually present tourists' basic profiles, establishing a foundation for subsequent segmentation group analysis and ensuring methodological consistency throughout the research process.

4.2 Pearson Correlation Examination

The analysis indicates a significant positive correlation between the degree of social media influence and first visit rates ($r=0.71$, $p<0.001$), where a one-point increase in social media influence increases the probability of a first visit by 23%. Furthermore, immersive first-view content positively correlates with extended dwell time in consumption contexts ($r=0.54$, $p=0.008$).

4.3 Chi-Square Test

The analysis shows that short video users exhibit a significantly higher preference for "internet celebrity same-style photos" (68%) compared to graphic/textual users (32%) ($\chi^2=15.2$, $p=0.001$).

Regarding platform-specific attraction preferences, TikTok users demonstrate stronger inclination toward "internet-famous sites" such as White Elephant House and Mountain City Lane ($\chi^2=9.8$, $p=0.007$), while WeChat users predominantly favor cultural attractions like Xiaohao Old Street.

5 MAIN FINDINGS

5.1 Main Findings

The study reveals the deep-rooted mechanism of social media's influence on tourists' behaviour through quantitative analysis, and the main findings can be summarised in the following three aspects:

Social media drives significant incremental growth in the tourism market: 72% of first-time visitors' decisions are directly influenced by social media content (based on questionnaire data), with short video platforms (TikTok) triggering immediate decisions through scenario-based visual stimulation and graphic platforms (Xiaohongshu) relying on the interpretation of cultural symbols to build long-term cognition.

Consumption structure shows "experience first" transformation: tourists' consumption in niche attractions, catering accounted for the highest proportion (average value of 38%), and the option of "choosing a restaurant on the recommendation of social media influencer" accounted for 53%, reflecting that social media content directly guides the preference of consumption scenarios.

There is a strong correlation between content form and behavioural preference: Short video users pay more attention to the "Rate of taking good photos" ($\chi^2=15.2$, $p=0.001$), while graphic users prefer "cultural uniqueness" ($p=0.012$). There is also a significant correlation between content form and consumption preference.

5.2 Guiding Implications of the Findings

Visual validation of the social media influence mechanism shows that the chi-square test and Pearson correlation analysis confirm the transmission path of "platform-content-behavior". Meanwhile, the matching effect between content form and consumption preference shows that the intensity of short video users' preference for "the same style of social media influencer" (68%) is 2.1 times higher than that of graphic users. In addition, in the early signals of structural changes in the tourism market, the added value of Chongqing's cultural and tourism

industry exceeded 120 billion yuan in 2023, with outstanding contributions from new business models such as nighttime consumption and pilot projects for the integration of commerce, culture, tourism, and sports. This indirectly confirmed the trend of increasing the proportion of the experience economy.

5.3 Practical Implications of Theoretical Marketing

5.3.1 Short Video Platforms

The strategic implementation prioritizes 15-second videos incorporating iconic visual symbols, such as the Hongyadong nightscape. This approach is supported by quantitative evidence: Question 8 (active search platforms) analysis reveals TikTok's dominance in respondents' proactive search behavior, coupled with its frequent mention in cross-platform decision-making influences. Concurrently, Question 4 (social media buzzword perception) demonstrates high-frequency selection of visualized cultural motifs like "Chongqing Light Rail through Buildings" and "White Elephant Residence Magic Rooftop," confirming the persuasive power of visual symbolism. Further validation emerges from Question 7 (action-triggering content features), where immersive first-view experiences and "internet celebrity photo template replication" achieved elevated scores, reinforcing the necessity to emphasize iconic scenes in short-form video production.

5.3.2 Graphic Platforms

Strategic recommendations emphasize the development of a "cultural exploration" content system, supported by data insights from user feedback. Survey data indicates that Xiaohongshu ranks as the second most active platform for cultural searches, with notable user interest in topics such as "local hidden gems" and "narrative-driven site interpretations". Respondents consistently rated "local insider tips" and "cultural uniqueness" as highly memorable content types, reinforcing the demand for authentic and specialized cultural experiences. However, feedback regarding content homogenization reveals a critical need for differentiation, particularly through detailed explorations of distinctive cultural elements like the green brick architecture on Xiaohao Old Street, to address repetitive content patterns and enhance engagement.

5.4 Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

The limitations of this study are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

First, the sample data is concentrated in Sichuan and Chongqing regions (34% of visitor sources), which may be affected by the spatial characteristics of mountainous cities and needs to be expanded to diversified landscapes such as seashores and plains to improve the generalizability of the conclusions. Second, the moderating effect of tourists' established preferences (e.g., historical interests, cultural literacy) on the influence of social media has not been systematically measured. Third, although the correlation analysis reveals the association of variables, it is difficult to verify the causal relationship with cross-sectional data, which needs to be further examined through A/B testing experimental design. Finally, existing studies show that the heat of Internet-famous landmarks exhibits a cyclical decay, and the present study does not track the temporal changes, so it is necessary to establish a long-term tracking mechanism to analyze the "iterative speed of content" through quarterly data collection. Therefore, it is essential to establish a long-term tracking mechanism to explore the dynamic relationship between "content iteration speed" (e.g., no less than three updates per month) and the revisit rate of tourists through quarterly data collection to avoid miscalculation of the heat lifecycle by cross-sectional data.

6 CONCLUSION

The study examines the impact of social media marketing on tourism growth and consumption patterns in Chongqing through a mixed-method approach. The findings reveal that social media significantly drives first-time tourist decisions, with short videos fostering immediate choices through visual symbols, while graphic platforms enhance long-term cultural cognition. Additionally, an "experience-first" consumption structure dominates, with social media directly guiding preferences for niche attractions and dining. The study proposes platform-specific strategies: prioritizing iconic visual content on short video platforms (e.g., TikTok) and enriching cultural narratives on graphic platforms (e.g., Xiaohongshu) to address content homogenization. These insights bridge the research gap in quantifying regional tourism growth attribution and offer a theoretical and practical

foundation for integrating cultural tourism with precision marketing, thereby supporting sustainable development in Chongqing's tourism industry.

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