The impact of UGC on hotel brand image

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Abstract: The development of new media technology continues to promote the transformation and upgrading of the hotel industry, and UGC has become one of the driving forces affecting the development of the hotel industry. Consumers turn into content producers and release UGC content through new media means to shape different hotel images, which brings opportunities and challenges for hotel branding. Therefore, analyzing the impact of UGC on hotel brand image plays an important role in enhancing hotel competitiveness. This paper adopts the literature research method to sort out the current hotel image shaped by UGC content in the hotel industry, with its problems, and explore how the hotel industry can actively respond to the opportunities and challenges, so as to provide a feasible basis for the high-quality development of the hotel industry.

1. Introduction

1.1 The application of UGC in hotel industry

Under the background of Web2.0 era, users are both consumers and producers of content, shifting from being an audience of information in the past to being a subject of information today, this way of generating information content is known as User Generated Content (UGC)[1].In 2005, with the rise of video-sharing website YouTube, the UGC model developed rapidly in the Internet with the momentum of a prairie fire.

UGC content creation and generation has become an important part of brand building, marketing, and influencing consumption. Compared with the traditional hotel brand marketing and publicity, users nowadays trust UGC content more, and often choose their favorite hotels to stay according to the recommendations of travel bloggers, sleep-testing officers and other UGC, whether it is user-generated UGC content or brand-promoted UGC, both of which activate the user's emotion and cognition of the hotel brand to a certain extent. It is because of the "intimate relationship" between UGC content and users, UGC content is widely used in the hotel industry and has become an important step in business promotion to attract customers.

This paper focuses on the impact of hotel UGC on hotel brand image by organizing and analyzing previous literature. It aims to study the path of UGC in brand building and how hotel brand recognition and loyalty are formed. This study is conducted to help the hotel industry understand the laws of consumer behavior and brand management, and to provide a theoretical basis for operators to formulate more effective marketing strategies.

2. Hotel brand image built by UGC

2.1 The path of ugc constructing hotel brand image

Brand image is about the brand perception of the brand in the mind of the audience. Today's scholars generally believe that brand image to symbolize the visual form of brand image recognition, by stimulating the consumer's senses to produce a deep impression. Consumers receive brand information through four stages of information processing: cognition, memory, evaluation, and emotion, each of which not only includes the predefined information of the brand image communicator, but also contains "noise information" that deconstructs the brand image or has nothing to do with the brand image, which indicates that there is a certain deviation between the brand image and the consumer's interpretation of the brand image[2]. This indicates that there is a certain deviation between brand image and the brand image interpreted by consumers.

Nowadays, the access threshold of the Internet is lowered, network applications are deeply integrated with daily life, and the flood of information makes the audience fall into a selection circle, so that people have to decode and filter the information on the Internet to choose the most favorable information. Unlike business information, ugc is a non-commercial, interactive "zero-media" between people, recommending products and services, and it is easier to gain the trust of the audience, producing a communication effect that cannot be obtained by the traditional mass media [3]. UGC is the original content published by users through the new media on the Internet, and the creation of hotel ugc is often based on ota sites, short-form media, and other media, such as the Internet. The content often uses ota websites, short video platforms, etc. as the communication medium, and pictures, text, and video as the mode of communication, adopting a one-to-many form of communication, presenting different hotel brand images. Hotel ugc, like other ugc modes, has "blurred" creator boundaries, including not only ordinary users, but also professionals, and the brand image of hotels shaped by different users is also very different, which in general shows the following two image categories.

Business model - constructing "beauty". Because consumers are more in favor of original user content (OUC), hotel ugc has become a "soft advertisement" for hotel brand image presentation. Travel experts, sleep tasters, recommendation officers and other professional users as disseminators, content creation and profit from it, through professional pictures, video shooting, with soft text to introduce the text, put the advantages of big hotels, to build a beautiful hotel image to attract consumers.

Experience mode - show the real. Compared with professional users, the general user is presented by the hotel brand image is more real. This kind of hotel ugc content, most of the general user experience evaluation after staying, through the real shooting pictures, video show stay environment, in ctrip, dianping and other ota site to publish evaluation, or spontaneously through the small red book, short video platform to publish stay feeling.

The above two models present two different hotel brand images, but at the same time there is a certain correlation between them. The beautiful image constructed by professional users in the business model will attract ordinary users to "plant grass" and hit the card; ordinary users will re-recognize the brand image of the hotel through the experience, which will strengthen the beautiful image on the one hand and deconstruct the beautiful image on the other.

2.2 Mechanisms by which UGC influences hotel brand recognition and loyalty

UGC mainly enhances hotel brand recognition and loyalty through social recognition and information dissemination, word-of-mouth and social evidence, personal engagement and user experience, as well as emotional resonance and identity. By participating in UGC activities, sharing

experiences and interacting with other users to show the truest possible look of the hotel, consumers not only increase brand exposure and word-of-mouth, but also establish emotional connection and identity, which in turn increases their loyalty to the hotel brand. Meanwhile, hotels usually take measures to encourage users to participate in UGC activities in order to increase their personal engagement and user experience, further enhancing consumers' emotional connection and identification with the brand.

From the perspective of social identity and information dissemination, consumers will share positive UGC when they are on social media platforms, such as their own hotel experiences and opinions, and other users will see these messages and engage in interactive behaviors such as retweeting, commenting, and liking these messages [4-5]. This dissemination of information can enhance the visibility of the hotel brand in social networks and improve brand recognition.

Also in terms of consumer psychology, consumers tend to trust reviews and suggestions from other consumers, as they consider these UGCs to be based on word-of-mouth from real consumers. Positive UGC can build a good reputation for a hotel brand, attract more consumers to choose the brand, and increase consumers' trust and reliability of the hotel brand, thus increasing their loyalty.

When users share their hotel-related memories, emotions and stories in UGC, other users may identify with these experiences as they may have similar experiences and feelings. This emotional resonance and identity can build a deep connection between consumers and hotel brands.

Overall, both commercial and experiential models are proposed to present the hotel's brand in a holistic manner from both professional and general users. The professional user's experience and evaluation of the hotel is authoritative and socially acceptable, influencing the decisions and attitudes of other users. Ordinary users add authenticity to the hotel while creating a sense of empathy for other users with similar experiences.

3. Problems with UGC's brand image building for hotels

In the context of the Internet, the UGC model has become one of the main ways to shape the brand image of the hotel. But it is because of the high participation and low accessibility of the UGC model that the discourse is really sinking. That prompt the users to actively participate in the production of hotel brand content, enrich the content of the information and accelerate the speed of dissemination. However, there are certain problems with the shaping of the brand image of the hotel by the UGC model.

3.1 High user engagement but vague brand positioning

For hotel brand image building, characteristic brand identification symbols and distinctive brand image positioning are the motivation to attract the attention of potential users. The UGC model greatly improves user engagement, but blurs the positioning of the hotel brand to a certain extent.

From the point of view of the differentiation of users' media literacy, there are also differences in users' shaping of hotel brand image. Not all consumers actively encode information and post information content about the hotel brand, and the UGC content posted by users also contains invalid and negative information, which makes it difficult to present an optimal hotel brand image.

Combined with the current OTA website, short videos and other platforms about the hotel brand image, most users will combine their own consumption experience to evaluate the hotel, and will not be along the hotel's established brand line of content feedback, the user's action experience is dispersed in the sense of habitation, comfort, etc., and the overall positioning of the hotel's brand image will be deviated. At the same time, the fragmented information content of UGC mode presents problems such as homogenization, one-sidedness, and ambiguity, on the one hand, it is a single description of the functional attributes of the hotel, which leads to the incompleteness of the hotel's brand image shaping, on the other hand, the sensitivity of the users to the negative evaluation is higher

than that of the positive evaluation, and it will eliminate the effect of the information dissemination of the hotel's brand.

3.2 Reviews are out of control and the hotel brand is less credible

UGC contains a large number of user reviews and ratings, which directly affect consumers' perception of and trust in the hotel brand. There are also inevitably some negative comments or opinions in UGC, such as poor service and outdated facilities. The existence of such content poses a potential threat to the hotel brand image. Moreover, user-generated content is often subjective, and positive and negative reviews may be biased or have personal preferences, so there is a need for proper management in balancing positive and negative reviews to avoid misleading consumers. Competitors may utilize UGC platforms to post reviews with bias or negativity in order to damage the brand image of competitors' hotels.

The widespread use of UGC has also led to the emergence of fake reviews. Some users may intentionally post untrue or exaggerated reviews for the purpose of financial gain or competitors, thus negatively affecting the image of the hotel brand. Identifying and preventing fake reviews has become an important issue in branding. This can seriously affect consumers' credibility of UGC, making it difficult for them to recognize real user feedback. On some UGC platforms, users can post reviews and ratings anonymously, which facilitates fake reviews and malicious behavior. Lack of authentication of real identities may undermine the credibility of UGC, and consumers are skeptical of the authenticity of anonymous reviews.

3.3 UGC management mechanism is incomplete

The lack of an effective UGC management mechanism can easily lead to the breeding of false information on the platform. Without strict auditing and supervision, artificially created false reviews, comments and ratings may mislead consumers. It also has a direct impact on hotel brand image. If the platform is flooded with a lot of false or negative content, consumers may be skeptical of the brand or choose to abandon it, thus adversely affecting the brand's reputation and credibility. Consumers often want to learn about the real experiences and opinions of other users through UGC, but when false content exists, they may become confused and disoriented, unable to accurately determine what is real and credible feedback.

If a hotel encounters negative UGC content, such as complaints, grievances or disputes, the lack of a management mechanism can make it difficult for the brand to effectively respond and resolve issues, which in turn can damage the brand image and user experience.

Users' trust in the UGC platform is the basis for users' engagement and content generation. If the platform fails to provide credible, accurate, and reliable UGC, users may turn to other platforms with higher credibility, thus reducing their active participation in hotel branding.

4. UGC Management and Response Strategies for Hotels

4.1 Establishment of a robust vetting mechanism

Ensure the authenticity and accuracy of UGC content, and filter false information and inappropriate content by reviewing user comments and ratings. A combination of manual review and automated filtering technology can be used to improve review efficiency and accuracy.

4.2 Proactive Engagement and Leadership UGC

Encourage consumers to actively participate in UGC generation by providing easy access to reviews and feedback on hotel websites, social media platforms and other channels. At the same time, it helps shape a positive brand image by guiding users to share positive experiences and unique stories.

4.3 Timely response to user feedback

For the problems, complaints or grievances raised by users in UGC, the hotel should respond and provide solutions as soon as possible. Positively facing user feedback and demonstrating concern and problem-solving attitude enhances users' trust in the brand.

4.4 Monitoring and analyzing UGC data

Hotel operators should pay close attention to user feedback and comments on UGC platforms, conduct data analysis to identify potential problems and trends, and adjust and improve the hotel's service and operation strategies based on the data results.

5. Summary and discussion

The rapid development of the Internet era, for all walks of life to inject new momentum, UGC model for the development of the hotel industry to open "another window", the user is not only a consumer, but also become a hotel brand image shaper, UGC is also in the subtle influence of the hotel brand recognition and loyalty. In addition, it is because of the low accessibility of UGC content, but also for the hotel brand image shaping to bring certain problems, the hotel industry in grasping the advantages of UGC business promotion, to pay more attention to the management of UGC, the real use of UGC mode to realize the transformation and upgrading of the hotel.

UGC (User Generated Content) presents challenges and opportunities in the hospitality industry. Hotels should actively monitor and analyze UGC, including reviews, ratings, and images on social media, to understand what customers think about the hotel and respond to any negative information in a timely manner; responding and resolving customer issues in a timely manner is key to maintaining a good reputation. For customer experience, hotels can provide excellent service and good infrastructure including friendly staff, comfortable rooms, convenient amenities and tasty food and beverage, etc., which will favor guests to share positive UGC positively, which will in turn enhance the hotel's brand[6]. Hotels can also create online communities or forums where hotels can allow customers to share travel experiences, advice and stories, which not only increases the amount of UGC, but also promotes interaction and communication between customers. Positive UGC can also be utilized as a marketing asset, such as displaying customers' photos and comments on websites, social media and advertisements to attract more potential customers.

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