The Strategy and Practice of New Media Marketing in Rural Art Brand Building: Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater as An Example

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Abstract

In the context of the internet, shaping rural art brands with new media marketing has become an important means to realize rural strategies. To explore the feasibility and practical value of new media marketing in the branding of traditional rural culture, this article selects Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater as a case study, aiming to clarify how digital communication can expand the influence of the Xuancheng rural brand. The article combines multiplatform data for quantitative and qualitative analysis, adopts the research methods of field interviews, questionnaires and onsite observations, and systematically analyses the publicity mode and audience preferences of Xuancheng Rural Theater. Three strategies, i.e., multiplatform coverage, creative expression and cultural tourism integration, are proposed, a comprehensive plan that integrates cultural communication, audience interaction and commercial value, and new ideas for the digital transformation of rural art are provided. The survey results show that the integration of online and offline resources is conducive to strengthening the communication radius of opera brands, promoting the rise of audience stickiness, and bringing new opportunities for the coordinated development of rural culture and the economy. The case study shows that the comprehensive use of multiplatform communication, creative content expression and deep integration of culture and tourism not only effectively expands the audience scope and communication depth of rural art brands but also significantly enhances participation, opening a new path for the digital inheritance of rural culture and the coordinated development of the economy and showing broad prospects and potential.

Keywords

new media marketing, rural art brand, Huagu Theater, digital communication

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous promotion of the "rural revitalization" strategy, a wave of empowering rural development with culture and art has swept the country. Art is no longer the loof Yangchun Baixue; rather, it integrates into the rural texture and becomes an important force to activate the genes of rural culture and improve the quality of rural life. How to give full play to the role of culture and art in rural revitalization and shift the countryside from rich to beautiful is a realistic issue.

Digital technology has long become an important driving factor in modern society, and various new media platforms have had a significant impact on social networking, entertainment, business and even public

management. For rural economic and cultural construction, new media means the expansion of the communication radius and diversified interaction methods. The academic community has engaged in in-depth discussions on new media marketing, rural tourism promotion and other aspects, covering the theory of innovation diffusion, the exploration of regional characteristics, the transformation of live e-commerce and other topics (Zhang et al., 2019). Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater is located in southern Anhui and has a strong traditional cultural atmosphere. The Huagu Opera has a solid foundation among local people, but its brand voice needs to be improved.

When the rural revitalization strategy is implemented, localities pay more attention to the cultivation of cultural soft power. Researchers have noted that the combination of cultural forms and modern technology can provide a flexible way of communication for rural brands, which has the potential to overcome the constraints of geography and resources to a certain extent (Agrawal, 2024). Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater has a unique performance strength. If it can use short videos, live broadcasts and other new media, it may attract a large audience and strengthen its cultural influence. The literature has relatively limited discussion on the digital promotion of opera cultural institutions. This article selects a typical case of a huagu theater for analysis, aiming to explore the feasible path of traditional opera in the new media marketing environment and provide operational guidelines for the shaping and dissemination of rural cultural brands.

The content of the article covers the theoretical basis of new media marketing and rural brand building, the resource endowment and brand status of Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater, the landing method and effectiveness evaluation of new media strategies in actual operations, and optimization ideas from a long-term perspective. The overall idea is developed from five aspects: theory, case, strategy, evaluation and outlook. It is hoped that through in-depth analysis, the local art of flower and drum opera will be promoted to gain more attention in the digital age and provide reference experience models for other related fields.

The existing reference literature can be classified into "new media marketing theory", "rural culture brand building" and "digital communication of opera". Research has shown that the existing research on the digital promotion of opera institutions is insufficient. Although Xuancheng Flower and Drum Opera have a deep folk foundation, their brand voices are insufficient. How to break through geographical restrictions through new media is its core challenge. This article focuses on the use of new media to create art brands with local characteristics to promote the dissemination of opera culture in the new era.

2. The Theoretical Basis of New Media Marketing and Rural Brand Shaping

2.1 Innovation Diffusion Theory and the Rural Economy and Culture

The theory of innovation diffusion was proposed by American scholar E.M. Rogers in the 1960s. This theory suggests that innovation (including new products, ideas, concepts, technical information and specific practices) is realized in a social system through information exchange and influence. Spread. This type of communication is the flow or movement of innovation from one source individual to another recipient, which can change the possibility of the recipient accepting innovation. The theory of innovation diffusion is used to explore the dissemination process of new ideas or new things in the social system. The core dimensions include relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, experiment ability and observability. In the rural economic and cultural system, new media, as the main diffusion medium, closely matches regional characteristics with the needs of the audience through multiplatform channels. Traditional opera has unique aesthetic and artistic value, but if it is limited to small-scale performance, the boundaries of communication are often very limited. Therefore, rural revitalization urgently needs to use the theory of innovation diffusion to expand its brand and artistic influence.

The speed of information diffusion in the digital era has greatly increased, and the flow of content between platforms has gradually blurred geographical barriers (Meng et al., 2023). The innovation of rural culture, such as new cultural expressions, cultural activities or cultural concepts, gradually spreads in rural society through dissemination, affecting the cultural identity and lifestyle of villagers. This diffusion process not only helps to protect and inherit traditional culture but also promotes cultural diversity and innovative development. Moreover, the innovation and diffusion of rural culture also interact with economic factors to promote the overall development of rural society. Typical examples include the cultural and creative industry in Sanfang Village in Beijing, the ecological cultural tourism industry in Anjiyu Village in Zhejiang Province, and the

film and television industry in Tulou, Fujian. For the construction of the rural cultural brand of Xuancheng West Village, the key to development is how to not only maintain the original characteristics of rural art but also consider the content preferences of the modern audience. Innovation diffusion theory emphasizes the cycle of "test-feedback-retest" (Rogers, 1983). The promotion of opera in the new media environment can be tested through content diversification, and background data can be used to adjust the program style or performance characteristics. If the Huagu Theater in Xuancheng Xicun can fully apply these ideas, it will have the opportunity to reduce the barriers to understanding caused by cultural differences.

A classic application case of innovation diffusion theory in the field of cultural communication is the inheritance of "face-to-face sculpture art in nonheritage digitalization". Mianrenlang facial sculpture art is a national intangible cultural heritage. Its third generation inheritor, Lang Jiaziyi, has realized the innovative diffusion of facial sculpture art through digital means. He uses 3D modelling technology to digitally store surface sculpture works so that these works can be permanently saved and shared with more people through various mobile ports. In addition, Lang Jiaziyi combined current news, sports, fashion and other elements to create a series of facial sculptures that address the aesthetic habits of young people and disseminated them through short video platforms, attracting the attention and love of many young people. This case illustrates the practical application of innovative diffusion theory in nonheritage digital inheritance. Through digital means, nonheritage culture can transcend the limitations of time and space to achieve wider dissemination and acceptance. At the same time, Lang Jiazi's innovative practice has also injected a new impetus into the protection and live inheritance of nonheritage culture so that traditional skills can exude new vitality in modern society.

2.2 Links between Rural Cultural Elements and Brand Value

Rural cultural elements, including regional culture, historical events, intangible heritage and other multiple connotations, are the core components of rural brand values. Rural brands are often established on the basis of unique historical, folklore, art, architecture and other cultural elements of rural areas. These cultural elements give rural brands profound cultural heritage and unique personality characteristics, distinguishing them from other brands in the market. Typical examples include Miao embroidery elements in 18 cave villages in Xiangxi, Hunan Province. The cultural and creative products of these Miao villages are exported to many countries. By deeply exploring and refining rural cultural elements and integrating them into the design, publicity and promotion of rural brands, rural brands with distinctive regional characteristics and cultural connotations can be created, thus enhancing the recognition and attractiveness of the brand. The flower and drum opera in Xuancheng West Village itself carry local customs and folk emotions, reflecting the production and lifestyle of local residents in various forms, such as lyrics, melodies, costumes and props. If brand shaping can systematically present these symbols, it can create a distinctive cultural logo. Research shows that brands with deep cultural backgrounds often easily attract the "curiosity" of the audience or consumers in the digital environment and then turn into stable loyalty (Zhang et al., 2022).

If flower and drum operas want to blend with new media, they need to balance artistic value and public entertainment needs. Simply intercepting opera fragments may dilute the overall beauty of the plot and vocals, making it difficult for the audience to understand its depth. With the help of the interactive function, users can participate in plot discussions, plot voting or interact with actors online. This move can not only extend the cultural extension of the theatre but also strengthen the emotional connection between the theater and fans. If Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater can find a balance between inheritance and innovation, it will lay a solid foundation for the shaping and development of its brand.

3. Overview and Brand Status of Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater

3.1 Geographical Location and Cultural Characteristics

Xuancheng West Village is located in southern Anhui, bordering the Shuiyang River in the east and surrounded by mountains to the north and south. This geographical environment gives Xicun a unique natural scenery and pastoral style. The territory is mainly mountainous, with an area of 8,744 mu, including 7,894 mu of Maozhu and Yuanzhu, and the forest coverage rate is as high as 85%. Rich natural resources provide a solid foundation for the development of Xicun.

Xicun has a profound cultural heritage and is the birthplace of the national intangible cultural heritage of flower and drum opera in southern Anhui. As early as 1952, Xicun formed the Anhui South Flower and Drum Troupe, which has been passed down to this day. Xicun Huagu Theater is located in a geographical environment with a deep historical and cultural atmosphere and organizes folk artists to perform operations year round. According to the statistics of the local cultural department, Xicun Huagu Theater accounts for a large proportion of regional cultural performance, bringing approximately 40--50 public performances to the masses every year, most of which are traditional plays such as marriage, persuasion, and historical stories (Xi, 2024). Flower and drum opera integrate the tones of southern Anhui, folk music styles and agricultural cultural symbols. On this basis, Xicun Huagu Theater retains more authentic vocals, accompaniment and costume characteristics. The accompaniment often uses gongs and drums, gongs, huqin and local bamboo flutes. The lyrics are easy to understand and are deeply loved by rural audiences. Most of the main actors of the local flower and drum opera have learned from their family opera predecessors since they were teenagers, the performance style pays attention to the emotional expression of the characters, and the plot is often close to local life. This simple and vivid artistic feature has attracted the continuous attention of local middle-aged and elderly people and traditional opera lovers.

The geographical location gives theater the potential to develop a combination of rural culture and tourism. The nearby landscape is rich in sightseeing value. The surrounding villages retain the typical residential style of southern Anhui, and some villages have built homestays. In recent years, Xicun has vigorously developed the leading industry of organic rice in terms of the advantages of resources while promoting agricultural culture and flower and drum opera in southern Anhui. Through the exploration of the deep integration of photography art, outdoor installation art, painting art, etc., Xicun has gradually established a new model of agricultural industrialization that integrates organic agriculture, leisure agriculture, rural tourism and youth research, forming a unique rural brand.

3.2 Brand Positioning and Audience Structure

The brand concept set by the theater is "guarding the essence of traditional flower drums and telling local stories". The management focuses on the foundation of private communities, mainly serving offline needs such as local village festivals. To promote the external market, the Institute tried to carry out many performances in the city and cooperated with cultural tourism activities in neighboring areas.

In terms of audience structure, the subject group distributed 200 questionnaires in January 2024 and recovered 180 valid questionnaires. The results show that the age of the viewing group is mainly 45 years, accounting for 65%, and the age group of 20--35 years accounts for 22%, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Audience Age Distribution Pie Chart

Among them, approximately 41% of the respondents said that they would watch the flower and drum opera at least twice a year, and 34% of the population would only watch the performance when they were invited by

festivals or relatives and friends. Local audiences account for the majority, and foreign tourists account for only 15%. In terms of the audience, "nostalgia" and "accompany of relatives and friends" are the main reasons. Approximately 21% of the participants focused on "local art interest", and fewer than 10% were interested in "online platform preview".

3.3 Current Situation of New Media Application

In the digital age, many rural art groups have been promoted with the help of short videos, social media and online live broadcasts. However, there is a common problem: the lack of content planning leads to a low user retention rate. The reasons are as follows. First, the content is messy, and the video theme is unclear, which may prevent users from having a continuous interest in video content. For example, some short video accounts release food content today, release travel content tomorrow, and become funny paragraphs the day after tomorrow, resulting in chaos in the fan community and making it difficult to form stable user stickiness. Second, the user's interactivity is poor, and users cannot deeply participate in video content, resulting in a shallow viewing experience. For example, there are no interactive links such as questions, voting, comments, etc., in the video. Users only passively receive information, which makes it difficult to generate a sense of immersion and participation. Third, the content lacks innovation, and videos are not attractive enough. The video content is too long or bland to stimulate users' desire to watch.

Xicun Huagu Theater has also made several attempts, but this problem also exists. For example, a short singing clip has been uploaded on the TikTok short video platform, and each video is usually only two to three minutes long. According to informal statistics, the number of videos launched on the official account of the theatre in the past year was approximately 15, with an average of approximately 500 views, and the number of fans following was less than 200 (Mo et al., 2017). The institute does not have a full-time operation team for the time being. The actors and staff use mobile phones to shoot and edit. The image quality, sound quality and postproduction special effects are relatively simple. At present, there is almost no planning or interaction mechanism for in-depth publicity. Online live broadcasts are more likely to appear in temporary activities on the day of festival performance, and their duration is limited. This shows that theaters lack systematic thinking at the level of new media marketing and that the data information collection and audience feedback channels are not yet perfect.

4. New Media Marketing Strategies and Practical Paths

4.1 Strategic Framework

The new media marketing strategy framework of Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Opera includes the following elements:

First, do a good job in products and lock in the target market. As a national intangible cultural heritage, Xicun Flower and Drum Opera's unique opera performance and cultural connotation are the core products. Identify the target customers, mainly opera lovers who have a deep interest in traditional culture and opera, tourists who come to Xuancheng, and young people who are willing to try new things.

Second, it is important to build the Xicun Huagu Theater's brand and improve its popularity through the combination of online and offline activities. Social media (such as WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok) and video websites (such as Youku and iQIYI) can be used to publicize and promote online. Offline publicity and promotion through tourism cooperation, cultural activities, opera performances and other methods. Using the correct media marketing method, we should not only pay attention to content marketing and produce high-quality opera videos and graphic and text content but also pay attention to social media marketing; use social media platforms for interactive marketing, such as questions and answers, voting, lucky draws and other activities; increase user participation; and use cooperative marketing, with tourism agencies, literature chemical institutions and others cooperating to jointly promote the Xicun Flower and Drum Opera.

The third is to improve staged brand service and improve customers' sense of use:

1) Problem perception stage: Through new media publicity, the target customers understand the existence and charm of the Xicun Huagu Opera.

- 2) The information search stage provides detailed opera introductions, performance information, ticket purchase methods, etc., to help customers obtain the required information.
- 3) The product evaluation stage enhances customers' trust in Xicun Huagu Opera through online and offline word-of-mouth communication, user evaluation and other means.
- 4) Product purchase stage: simplify the ticket purchase process and provide convenient ticket purchase channels, such as online ticket purchases and telephone reservations.
- 5) Postpurchase evaluation stage: encourage customers to share their experience of watching dramas and spread word of mouth through social media and other channels.
- 6) Service: Provide online and offline opera viewing, learning and experience services, such as online live broadcasts, offline performance, and opera research.

Finally, it should be constantly detected and optimized. The effects of new media marketing can be monitored through data analysis tools, such as attention, likes, retweets, and comments. According to the data monitoring results, the effects of new media marketing, such as the improvement in popularity and the increase in the number of viewers, can be evaluated. Strategy optimization: According to the results of the effect evaluation, the new media marketing strategy, such as adjusting the publicity content and channel selection, should be optimized and adjusted.

4.2 Implementation Path

First, we should start with creative content and cultural and artistic exploration. Flower and drum opera have a diversified stage performance space, and the plot, vocals, costumes and props can derive multiple creative directions. When the content is creative, the theater can focus on the characters, environment and themes. The actor's characterization often reveals a distinctive personality. Through exclusive interviews or character costumes, the audience's emotional connection with the artist can be strengthened. The pastoral landscape and village stage can enhance traditional interest, and the rehearsal and performance pictures are integrated into the mountains of Anhui Mountain, which can highlight regional characteristics. Some of the plays are based on local stories, which evoke the intimacy of local residents and provide assistance for young audiences to understand the plot through camera language and subtitles. Notably, the core performance core of the excavation of folk art should be retained and packaged in combination with modern aesthetic methods. This kind of thinking is conducive to balancing artistic value and the public interest.

Second, we are committed to talent training and echelon construction. New media operations require professional capabilities such as video shooting, editing, design and data monitoring. The Xicun Huagu Theater is not yet equipped with fixed technical personnel. The actors and staff are more engaged in rehearsals and performances, and it is difficult to invest extra energy in online publicity. If you can rely on universities or social training institutions to select young people who master video production and community operation skills to join the team, it is expected to compensate for the technical shortcomings. Internally, basic training can be carried out according to the actual situation so that some actors have simple shooting and postprocessing capabilities. Major performance seasons can absorb short-term assistance through the volunteer mechanism and maintain enthusiasm through practical proofs or certain subsidies. The combination of multiple measures can create a sustainable echelon structure for new media marketing.

After content creation is completed, it is necessary to promote media publicity, focusing on multiplatform publicity and circle segmentation. New media communication is not limited to a single channel. Short video platforms, live broadcast platforms, graphic and text social platforms and tourism promotion websites present different audience structures. The Institute should expand the brand voice and improve the subdivision of the circle in combination with the characteristics of the opera. For example, TikTok focuses on short video diversions, WeChat community maintenance of Shanxin users, and Ctrip cooperation with cultural tourism diversions. The short video platform can focus on the essence of singing and behind-the-scenes tidbits, the live broadcast platform is suitable for real-time interaction of rehearsals or performance sites, graphic and text social media are convenient for issuing performance announcements or actor dynamics, and travel websites can incorporate flower and drum performances into local cultural tour routes. This kind of multiplatform layout can reach different age groups and interest groups. According to the questionnaire, viewers under the age of 40 prefer short videos and social platforms, whereas the older group relies on TV or social software. When

theatres present content in different media, they should highlight different strategies so that core fans and potential tourists can meet their own needs.

Moreover, the combination of online and offline linkages and cultural tourism is also an important focus of media marketing. The offline stage experience enriches the extension of digital communication, and flower and drum play can form a comprehensive attraction after connecting with rural tourism resources. The linkage plan of performances and homestays or farmhouses provides a one-stop arrangement of "daytime rural tours and night opera performances" for foreign tourists. Theme activities often rely on festivals and cultural seasons and introduce a number of special performances so that foreign groups can experience the essence of opera in a short time. The theater can also develop cultural and creative peripherals, such as character-derived dolls and opera costumes and souvenirs, providing diverse choices to online and offline audiences. This integration method combines regional sightseeing and art appreciation. On the basis of serving local residents, foreign visitors explore the customs of southern Anhui in depth.

4.3 Expected Effect

First, product popularity should be improved through new media marketing, allowing more people to know about Xicun Flower and Drum Opera, breaking down the regional restrictions and barriers of Xicun Flower and Drum Opera, and promoting the widespread dissemination of Flower and Drum Opera culture. Second, attracting audiences, driving local economic growth, improving regional living standards, increasing the number of online and offline audiences, and increasing box office revenue are needed. The most important thing is to inherit traditional Chinese culture. Through new media channels, more people can understand and inherit the intangible cultural heritage of Xicun Flower and Drum Opera so that this excellent culture can extend to the whole country and even the world.

5. Effect Evaluation and Improvement Ideas

5.1 Data Analysis and Feedback Mechanism

The effectiveness of new media marketing can be measured by the number of plays, the number of comments and forwards, the duration of the user stay and the online conversion rate. According to the survey, the average number of views of Xicun Huagu Theater on the short video platform is approximately 500, the number of likes is less than 50, and the number of comments is less than 10. If systematic promotion can be promoted, the number of plays and the degree of interaction may increase significantly. The background data of the platform can show the age and regional distribution of the audience, which is convenient for differentiated content adjustments for different groups of people. Whether live broadcasts and short videos can drive offline tickets or cultural and creative sales is the key to testing the conversion effect. Theaters should also collect bullet screen questions and online questionnaire feedback in a timely manner to improve the direction of creation and release rhythm.

5.2 Specific Results and Stage Data

To observe the preliminary pilot results, the research team assisted the theater in launching the marketing plan of "short video update, live Q&A and offline promotion" within five months and recorded the differences before and after. The official account released a total of 15 rehearsal short films, the number of fans increased from less than 200 to 500, and the number of single video plays increased from 500 to 1,200. The number of likes in some content exceeds 100, and the number of comments and discussions has increased significantly, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Bar chart of video views and interactions on short video platforms

Two of the performances attracted a total of approximately 600 spectators, approximately 20% higher than before, as shown in Figure 3. The survey shows that approximately 40% of the audience source contains online channels, of which short video previews or live streaming pushes account for a large proportion. The onsite cultural and creative booths sell souvenirs and peripheral products, and the revenue has increased by 30% compared with the previous revenue, which provides a positive reference for the subsequent deep combination of "opera + cultural tourism".



Figure 3: Line chart of the change in audience numbers for performances from January to May 2024

5.3 Direction of Optimization and Improvement

After the introduction of new media marketing, theatre should constantly polish content quality and theme planning to strengthen the artistic fit of operas and public aesthetics. If you want to present a higher level of live broadcasts and short videos, you need to purchase lighting and audio equipment and seek funding from social enterprises or cultural funds to alleviate the cost pressure. For the integration of culture and tourism, working with professional teams to plan a series of thematic activities, such as "Flower and Drum Opera Culture Week" or "Country Water Stage", to form diverse brand cultural tourism products is recommended. Young people are the key force in the inheritance of opera. They can cooperate with schools or youth associations to organize opera popularization classes and open rehearsal days so that students can feel the charm of flower and drum opera in the interactive experience. If it can rely on data monitoring and user feedback for continuous iteration, Xuancheng Xicun Huagu Theater may move towards a stable digitalization road.

6. Conclusion

This study applies the theory of innovative diffusion to rural opera brands and proposes a model of "cultural element symbolization + new media matrix operation" to provide a replicable communication paradigm for similar nonheritage projects. The theory of innovation diffusion provides the perspective of communication speed and depth of interaction, and the integration of cultural elements and brand value emphasizes the matching of local characteristics and modern needs (Zhang & Deng, 2023).

Through a multiplatform layout, creative content shaping and online and offline linkages, theatre has considerable prospects for the development of young audiences and the extension of geographical influence. As long as it cooperates with systematic data evaluation and community operation, the audience will gradually move from "curiosity" to "love" and develop a deeper identification with the folklore. If it can rely on more perfect funds, technology and policy support, the theater may grow into a wider range of flower and drum opera cultural brands.

Such cases are of practical importance to the cultural construction of rural revitalization and the inheritance of local opera. Only by effectively connecting traditional art with contemporary media can cultural heritage gain lasting vitality. The new media marketing practice of Xicun Huagu provides valuable experience for the new media marketing of local operas and enriches the theoretical system of new media marketing. Through new media marketing, Xicun Flower and Drum Opera can be disseminated and inherited in a wider range, providing new ideas and methods for the inheritance and development of local operas. The new media marketing practice of Xicun Huagu Opera not only promotes the dissemination and development of Huagu Opera itself but also drives the development and innovation of relevant cultural industries, such as tourism, cultural and creative products, etc., and provides innovative ideas for rural revitalization.

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