

Successful Crisis Recovery in Tourist Resorts From Covid-19: The Case of Xixiakou Village, China

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Abstract

With the outbreak of COVID-19, a series of measurements, such as lockdowns and requirements of social distancing, were not only greatly impacting consumers, but also placed unprecedented demands on most industries. As an industry focusing on consumer experience, tourism market suffered severe knocks especially. Thus, what is significantly is how to recover customers' confidence and purchase intention in tourism industry after pandemic. This study employed a case study method, analyzed the successful practices at Xixiakou scenic spot in Shandong, PR China. A new customer engagement model using new media channels was developed, which combined with the theory of customer engagement, social media engagement and virtual reality. The result indicates that self-driving tours as well as the old-age tourism market will be promising after pandemic. This study will not only enrich the existing theories, but also provide empirical implications for recovery of scenic spot.

Keywords: tourism, China, recovery, COVID-19, crisis management, new media channel, customer engagement

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce

Up to the time of writing, most of the hospitality and tourism industry in the world is still severely impacted by COVID-19 as the result of ongoing full or partial lockdowns. Existing crisis management theories emphasize the key to service industry recovery dwells on restoring customer confidence through effective communication, such as via media, marketing strategies and messages and destination image (Judith et al., 2016). Nevertheless, conventional communication channels do not always work during the serve pandemic. Sometimes, social media was preferred, instead of realistic interaction, if people feel lonely (Nowland, Necka, & Cacioppo, 2018). The level of health risks, lockdown measures, social distancing rules, business practices of reducing transmission are unprecedented, leading to an extreme increase in the usage of Internet and social media consequently (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

The present study advocates a new communication approach that is based on new media channels, involving not long websites but real-time digital communication and information sharing (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). New media features the characteristics of digital, participatory, interactive, transparent, real-time, long-term, universal and network (Sashi, 2012). However, it has not been explored in the exiting literature on crisis recovery. The purpose of the present study is to demonstrate how to apply new media to restore customers' confidence and purchase intention in tourism, as well as maintain ongoing relationship with customers.

Using a case study approach, the present research elaborates how Xixiakou a scenic spot in PR China has successfully applied new media channel during the lockdown in China in engaging customers and preparing them for the future when lockdown was lifted. The data consisted of observation of the virtual activities performed by Xixiakou and the follow-up questionnaires that evaluated the effects of these virtual efforts. A new customer

engagement model using new media channels is developed in the end to enrich the existing crisis management in the regard of communication with customers.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Crisis Management

Crisis and disaster management has long taken the agenda of influencing the direction of distractive events to restore the status quo promptly, minimize economic losses and maintain public confidence during and after the events. Judith et al. (2016) identified six factors from the extant tourism literature on crisis recovery.

Firstly, communication, as the core of crisis management, is related to information sharing with employees, consumers, and other stakeholders. It is of paramount importance of sending timely and positive messages on the grounds that tourists particularly international tourists lack local knowledge and demand accurate information to ease their mind (Ritchie, 2008). The media, secondly, is an important vehicle in passing information and updating the public's understanding of crisis management development (Ghaderi, Mat Som, & Henderson, 2012). Meanwhile, Media is also keen on providing detailed description and updates to satisfy consumers' enthusiasm and compassion (Frisby, 2002), thus achieving a policy influence on the government. For example, the media coverage on the fatal bushfires in Australia pushed the state and municipal funds to restore the devastated tourism infrastructure (Cioccio & Michael, 2007). Thirdly, marketing strategy refers that enterprises transmit product information to consumers, arouse their attention and interest, and stimulate their purchasing desire and behavior through various promotional means to achieve the purpose of expanding sales (Judith et al., 2016). Floyd et al. (2004) found that persuasive advertisement contributed to encouraging Americans to resume travelling in only four weeks after the attack of September 11th, from which it can be proved that specific marketing strategies are more effective than broad communications (Peters & Pikkemaa, 2006), and an excellent marketing strategy may play a key role in event recovery. Considering the physical distance restriction caused by pandemic, only combine media with marketing strategy can communication work. Thereby, to discuss crisis recovery in the context of contactless is necessary. Fourthly, comprehensive management plans and future preparations involves changing existing tourist products features and applying preventive measures to enhance consumers' perception of a safe and reliable destination. Tsai and Chen (2010) found that hoteliers in Taiwan developed disaster management strategies to react to disaster experiencing a series of earthquakes, which is a passive decision obviously. Equally, Nicolette de Sausmarez (2007) suggest that the Malaysia government should have been more proactive for a prompter recovery after the crisis. Judith et al. (2016) noticed that there tended to be a lack of formal crisis or emergency management plans after crises, although they believed management plans and future preparedness are essential. Fifthly, destination image is (potential) tourists' overall evaluation of tourist destinations as well as level of understanding about its society, politics, economy, life, culture, tourism development (Crompton, 1979; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Destination image and reputation directly affect tourists' choice on destination (Judith et al., 2016). Melnik's (2008) advised that marketing strategies focus on improving and correcting the image of the disaster-affected destination. However, because of special property on the product, tourist attractions have to make every effort to improve tourists' perceived destination image though tourists cannot touch products physically, which is a tough way to go. Tourism behavior, finally, can determine the degree of a destination recovery after a crisis. Wang (2009) declares that tourists will cancel their travel plans when they perceive a high degree of physical risk. Fortunately, once the crisis is over, physical risk will decay (Floyd et al., 2004). Moreover, visiting friends and family is considered a more secure choice for holiday (Goodrich, 2002; Smith & Carmichael, 2006), which may even increase after a disaster.

1.2.2 Customer Engagement

Derived in the discipline of Psychology, 'engagement' is defined as the degree of participation in socially interactive activities and is essentially the initiative and response to the social stimuli (Achterberg et al., 2003). Today engagement with customers has long been considered as leading to economic outcomes as in 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The 'customer engagement' in the marketing field refers to a psychological state that occurs when customers interact actively with other stakeholders during performing the service relationship and co-creation of customer experience (Brodie et al., 2011). The service-dominant logic believes that customers are value co-creators (Vargo & Lusch, 2014) who create values to themselves during such engagement. They create values to and influence the peer consumers by passing word-of-mouth, recommendation, building brand community (Witke and Hanekop, 2011; Kuvykaite and Piligrimiene, 2014) and consolidate brand loyalty (Nambisan and Baron, 2009). Such engagement involves emotional, physical, intellectual, and even spiritual change in individuals. The seminal work of Pine and Gilmore (1998) applies the level of engagement, expressed as abortion and participation, to the classification of four realms of experiences (i.e., educational, entertainment, esthetic, and escapist experience). A

participation is regarded as active when customers personally affect the performance or event; otherwise, passive participation. In the context of pandemic recovery, the fear of COVID-19 still impedes the tourism decision, and how to attract tourists to participant tourism practice actively is what tourism attractions should focus on.

Furthermore, customer engagement encompasses three dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011) that are cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Cognitive engagement refers to the state when customers obtain brand-related knowledge to reduce purchase risk. They tend to maintain a high degree of sensitivity and attention to the information about the company and/or of the brand. Emotional engagement mainly refers to the state of customers' affection and preference for the brand, for example, the feeling of proud when they use the product. The behavioral engagement refers to the state that customers provide feedback, continue to purchase, take the initiative to spread word-of-mouth to peer consumers, or participate in the development of new products (Verleye et al., 2014). The engagement can develop non-purchase intention among customers towards the brand or service provider, which is termed 'customer engagement behavior' (Choo & Petrick, 2014).

Additionally, Van Doorn et al. (2010) identify three antecedents that affects customer engagement: customer-, firm- and context-based (Figure 1). The customer-base concerns the motivation and goals of customers that involve perceived cognitive benefits, social integration benefits and hedonistic benefits (Verhagen et al., 2015). The customer motivations vary with the individual consumer characteristics, including consumer ability to explore information and the related experience, as well as gender, age, personality, and knowledge background. Customers' post-purchase satisfaction and the overall usage experience also plays an important role in customers' continuous engagement (Verleye et al., 2014). The firm-based factors are mainly concerned with brand-related characteristics, including firm reputation and brand equity and they influence the customers' engagement through brand knowledge (Van Doorn, 2010). Enterprises with a good brand reputation and high brand equity are more likely to develop positive purchase intentions and purchase behavior. Finally, the context-based factors relate to the macro environmental factors such as the political environment, economic or environmental environment, social environment, technological environment, and competitive environment (Van Doorn et al. 2010). Political and legal environments influence customer engagement by promoting or impeding the flow of information. Advances in the social and technological environment allow consumers to share experiences, express opinions, and learn other brands quickly. The natural environment and the competitive activities undertaken by the rival companies can stimulate certain customer reaction and response, consequently affecting their engagement with the existing business and products.

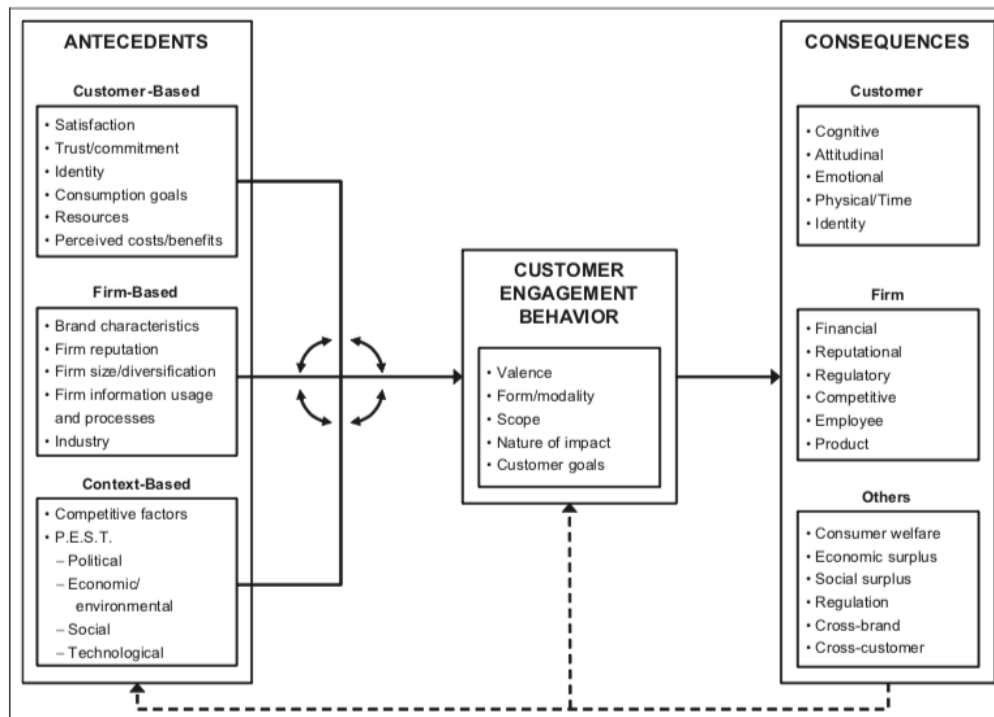


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Customer Engagement Behavior (Van Doorn et al. 2010)

1.2.3 Customer Engagement in New Media Channels

Recent years, with the rapid use of the Internet, studies on customer engagement extends to social media. Social media is defined as a collection of online communication channels, which is committed to community-based investment, interaction, content sharing and cooperation, such as blog (Mayfiel, 2008), showing characteristics of free participation, openness, interaction, self-organization, communication, and connectivity. It can stimulate participants to share information actively and provide convenient conditions for their all-round interaction. The social network platform provides users with functions such as commenting, forwarding, and creating content on product-related information, which greatly deepens the interaction opportunities between enterprises and consumers. Li et al. (2001) explored virtual experience in e-commerce through observing different types of mental activity, and in their opinions, virtual product attributes can capture consumers' unconscious attention and therefore form a different perception from that of a product based purely on direct experience, and even, virtual experiences have an edge over direct experiences. Given that, destinations should pay more attention on creating tourism activities that can provide satisfied virtual experience to attain more customer engagement. Mollen et al. (2010) defines online engagement as a cognitive and affective commitment to a positive relationship with the brand embodied by a website or other computer-mediated entity designed to communicate brand values.

In addition, the characteristics of social media impact on customer engagement. According to Harris et al. (2010), the web service media consists of three dimensions: aesthetic appeal, functional layout, and financial security. Aesthetic appeal reflects the hedonic value of the social media, while functional layout and financial security reflect the practical value of online media. The study by Reitz (2012) confirmed that functional layout factors such as perceived information quality and interactivity of a website can have a significant impact on customer engagement. The research of Wirtz et al. (2013) shows that factors related to online brand communities, such as the size of the online brand community, the online brand management model, and the duration of membership, affect customer engagement behavior.

To explain the characteristics of social media in achieving perceived customer benefits, Verhagen et al. (2015) proposed a model included four perceived benefits, which is cognitive benefits, social integration benefits, personal integration benefits and hedonic benefits individually, and among them, social integration benefits are related to the ability of media to promote social interaction (Beatty, Mayer, Coleman, Reynolds and Lee, 1996), and connect users with each other (Nambisan& Baron, 2009). Above mentioned four kinds of customer perceived benefits will lead to more positive behavior of customers in the virtual customer environment (Verhagen et al, 2015), influenced by eight important virtual customer environment characteristics: a) access to knowledge, b) feedback, c) social identification, d) company recognition, e) peer recognition, f) altruism and g) self-expression. Social identity and ties with others in the virtual customer environment affect customers' perceived social integration benefits as virtual customer engagement enables customers to establish and obtain social identity among community members, which gives customers a sense of belonging to a group with common social identity (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005). Futhermore, in the emerging social media environment, customers' sense of belonging in community communication, corporate brand equity and cash incentive system can further drive customer engagement (Zhang, Kandampully and Bilgihan, 2015).

According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, the online service scenario is a core driver of many important psychological variables (e.g., customer experience, customer satisfaction, perceived value, etc.) in the customer's online shopping process; Santini, et al. (2020) constructed a framework of customer engagement in social media (CESM) (Figure 2), which illustrates the positive contribution of psychological variables to customer engagement. The model suggests that a favorable online media environment helps to enhance customers' shopping experience, perceived value, and satisfaction, and leads to non-transactional behaviors such as writing reviews, answering questions, and making recommendations, thus achieving a state of customer engagement. Meanwhile, providing precious memories that the tourists can continuously share could help in the destinations' promotion because the visitors become the de facto expert in their social circle and willing marketers for the destination(Chen et al., 2021). What can be concluded is that social media can provide numerous potential values so that customers engagement will be improved.

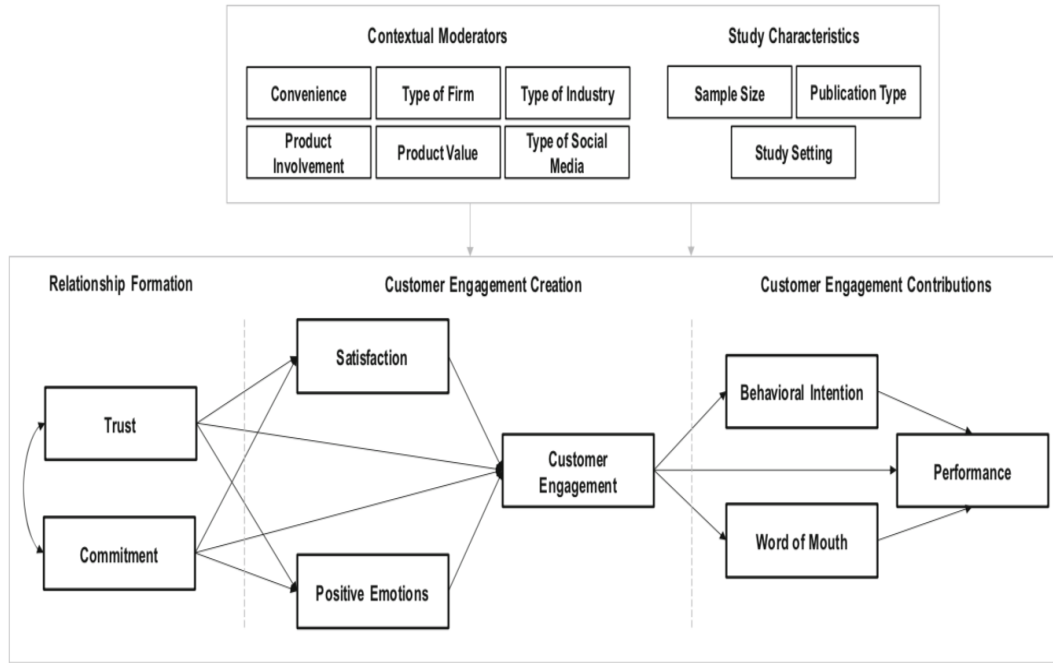


Figure 2. Framework of customer engagement in social media (CESM) (Santini, et al., 2020)

1.3 Research Framework

After the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, much of communication had to be conducted via Internet because of travel restrictions and increasing social distancing, so that social media turned into a significant communication channel increasingly under the circumstance. To accelerate crisis recovery of tourism attractions, it is necessary to pay more attention to how online activities can increase customer engagement. Given the change of communication channel, three influencing components were extracted in line with customer engagement theory, social media engagement theory and virtual reality theory, and that is sense of belonging, trust, and customer participation respectively. We propose the following new model for the communication mode of online activities (Figure 3), supposing all of three components can positively influence customer engagement.

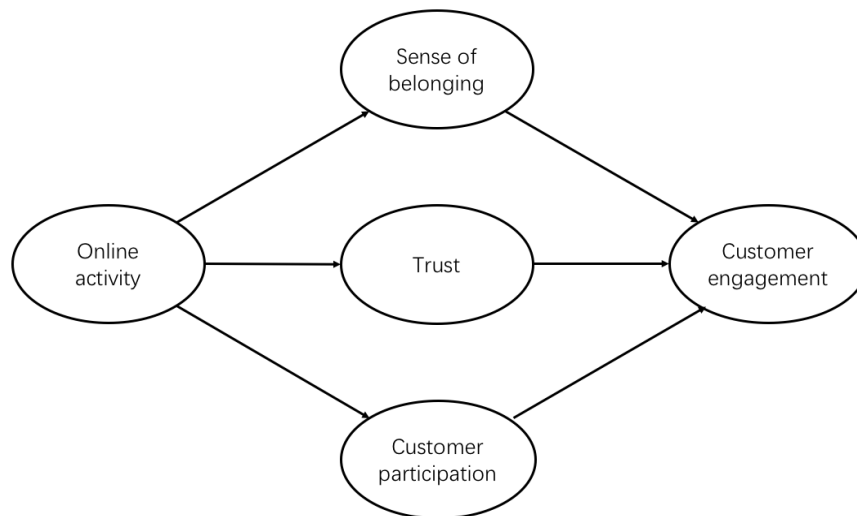


Figure 3. New model for the communication mode of online activities

2. Method

2.1 Case Study and Data Collection

Tourism destinations and attractions around the world are affected by COVID-19 on varying degrees. The recovery phases also diverse due to the extent of controlling the virus, the Internet and mobile technologies, tourist features and recovery funding to attractions. PR China is one of the most rapid recovery countries from the pandemic that has progressed to the post-pandemic recovery of tourist attractions. Their successful stories are valuable and provide references to others that are thinking of stimulating consumer engagement and maintain purchase intention.

This paper used the case approach and analyzed the successful practices at Xixiakou scenic spot in Shangdong, PR China. Before focusing on this attraction, the research team in September 2020 had examined the recovery management plan of six most important tourist attractions in Weihai City, Shandong Province, China, and monitored the tourist numbers in month/year when the social restrictions were lifted. We found that Xixiakou scenic spot's crisis recovery plan the most vigorous and secured the tourist numbers. Therefore, the aim of the case study to present the details of Xixiakou's recover plan particularly the virtual activities that were distinguished from the others.

2.2 Case Context

Xixiakou Tourist Area is in Xixiakou Village, the easternmost end of Huanhai Road, Rongcheng City, Weihai City, Shandong Province, China. It is a very well-known rural tourism destination for Chinese domestic tourists from the nearby provinces and Beijing, Inner Mongolia, and Jiangsu. Most are middle-income groups, travel with families and relatives, sightseeing purpose. The average annual growth rate of tourists has been 5%. In 2018, the tourist number reached 2.3 million, with a turnover of 115 million; in 2019 witnessed 2.49 million tourists and a turnover of 135 million.

At present, Xixiakou consists of five themed projects: Chengshantou National Scenic Area, Shendiao Mountain Wildlife World, Hailu Island, Motianling Eco-tourism Area, and Longxia Lake Water Park. Chengshantou and Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park are the most important of all. Chengshantou Scenic Area is the easternmost tip of the Jiaodong Peninsula in Shandong. Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park is the free-range coastal wildlife world of empty animals, covering an area of 3,800 acres, has a wild animal area, herbivore area, marine animal area, African animal area, bear park, aviary park, bird of prey park, orangutan park, golden monkey house, etc. The animal habitats such as the Panda Pavilion have more than 3,000 species of more than 400 national I and II protected animals.

Before the COVID-19, the profit and publicity of the tourism industry in Xixiakou Scenic Area relied on offline experience. Tourist experiences were created mainly from visiting the facilities provided on the site, such as Chengshantou Scenic Area and Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park. Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park also regularly organizes popular science research tours for kindergartens, primary and middle school students. The tour included visiting the feed room, making meals for animals, and feeding, interacting with animals, quizzes, and handcrafts such as madding windmills.

Xixiakou Scenic Area has also used online marketing methods and WeChat named "Xixiakou Tourism" and "Weihai Chengshantou Tourist Area" with audio guides of Chengshantou, as well as text descriptions and periodic update on the site with attractive photos. Tourists could buy tickets and made reservations via the two channels. The scenic spot also posts articles and pictures on other well-known WeChat public accounts such as "Cultural Tourism in Weihai" and "Weihai Travel" to attract more tourists. In general, before the pandemic, the marketing of Xixiakou Village was mainly offline marketing, supplemented by online official account marketing.

3. Results

The pandemic did not completely end when Xixiakou Scenic Area reopened on February 29, 2020. Xixiakou Scenic Area did a lot of work to restore the tourist status of the scenic area.

3.1 Measures to Restore the Destination Development

3.1.1 Virtual Interactive Communication

Xixiakou Tourist Area has increased its information dissemination efforts in the later period of the pandemic to communicate with tourists to the greatest extent. On the WeChat public account, the scenic spot publishes an article every week describing the latest information about the Xixiakou scenic spot, including online and offline event previews, promotion introductions, festival activities, spectacular pictures of the scenic spot, etc. Public following the official account can see it for free. These articles and pictures effectively disseminate the latest information of the scenic spot to tourists. The smooth holding of the event is the best proof of the safety of the scenic spot. Through

online communication, Xixiakou Tourist Area can gain the trust of tourists to a certain extent and arouse tourists' desire to visit.

3.1.2 Marketing Strategies and Messages

The Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park upgrades its offline science research and study tour activities online. Weihai Chengshantou Tourist Area has opened a public welfare science class "Animals Here" on Wechat account. The class introduces knowledge about animals to children aged 3-10 in the form of live broadcast and recording. The live broadcast started from May 2020, held at 20.00 pm on May 29, June 12, June 27, July 10, July 24, August 21, and September 4. Respectively, the theme animals are giant pandas, sloths, cubs, giraffes, kangaroos, gibbons, ring-tailed lemurs, and the live broadcast time varies from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. Take the first phase of the giant panda on May 29 as an example. At the beginning of the live broadcast, a recorded animation video is played to introduce the live broadcast theme. Then the live broadcast guide "Rainbow Sister" briefly introduce the panda's living habits, habitats, and distribution areas. In the live classroom, this part of the introduction is vividly referred to as "animal archives". After that, the lecturer asks several questions: How many toes does the panda have? What is the cry of the panda? With these questions, the real video in the Shendiaoshan Wildlife World that has been recorded is still being explained by the instructor "Rainbow Sister", accompanied by the real recorded video, and the initial questions are answered during the explanation process. Next part is the "Knowledge Memory Card" module. The lecturer gives a brief summary, sort out the knowledge learned in the live broadcast, and lead the audience to review. At the end of the live broadcast is the "Interactive Award" event. Audiences who send a message during the live broadcast can get customized dolls, customized postcards, Shendiaoshan Wildlife World Family Year Card, and Shendiaoshan Wildlife World admission tickets. These gifts need to be collected by the audience at Shendiaoshan Wildlife World in person. So far, the live broadcast has been conducted 7 times, and the total number of viewers has reached 60,000, with an average of 8,600 people watching each live broadcast. After the audience enter the official account, they can scan the QR code to make an appointment for free viewing in the live broadcast room. After the live broadcast ends, the audience can also enter the official account to watch the replay.

To increase promotion efforts and save publicity costs, the scenic spot adopts the method of hunger marketing and mails free postcards to the first 200 viewers who forward the WeChat moments. The scenic spot has fully promoted the Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park in the form of online public welfare classes. Children who have watched the live broadcast will also want to go to the Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park to experience the game in person.

The scenic spot has also carried out event marketing, using special festivals such as Dragon Boat Festival and Father's Day to launch special experience activities such as taking dad to see the world. These activities require visitors to make an online reservation in advance and go to the scenic spot to experience it in person. In addition, using the eight-day live self-driving tour event "Driving Shandong at the Time" organized by the Shandong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, Xixiakou Scenic Spot held a theme live broadcast at Chengshantou and Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park, on 17 August. The live broadcast activities can be watched by viewers from all over the country through a live broadcast platform. Event marketing can attract more tourists to Xixiakou and make Xixiakou Scenic Area well known to more remote tourists.

In terms of price, rural tourism, a tourism product with relatively large demand elasticity, can attract tourists at low prices. Xixiakou Scenic Area has also introduced a variety of pricing strategies to reduce or exempt entrance fees. Tourists make real-name reservations on the official account of "Weihai Chengshantou Tourist Area". Tourists can invite friends to help bargain through WeChat or start a group to get discounts. High school entrance examination students can enjoy discounted prices with their score certificates. Father's Day, Children's Day and other festivals Discounts are available for family outings. Medical staff with valid certificates are free of tickets throughout the year. Xixiakou Scenic Area places this ticket discount information in its own official account, which will attract more tourists to buy tickets.

3.1.3 Destination Image and Reputation

To quickly grab the attention of tourists after the pandemic, Xixiakou Scenic Area promptly changed its slogan. Before and after the pandemic, the travel needs of tourists have changed. For different travel needs, destinations must shape different images to fit. Using the questionnaire data during the pandemic period as the basis for tourist behavior analysis, it was found that wearing masks for long periods of time and quarantining in closed spaces made many people feel that breathing was not smooth. After the pandemic, breathing fresh air outdoors became the strongest tourism motivation for many tourists. Xixiakou, as a representative of rural tourism, originally have a small passenger flow and fresh air, which just happened to meet the needs of tourists after the pandemic. Therefore, in the promotion theme, Xixiakou Scenic Area emphasized the feature of "free breathing" provided by the scenic area,

using "Free breathing-If you are well, it will be sunny" as the publicity slogan to attract tourists' attention. "Xixiakou Tourism" and many other WeChat public accounts were promoted in the form of pictures and texts.

In terms of tourism products, Xixiakou Scenic Area took advantage of Chengshantou, which was considered the place where the Sun God lived in ancient times, and Qin Shihuang had visited for the elixir of life twice and launched the "You Wish I Deposit" line in the first week of the park. For the event, visitors can make an appointment to make a wish through the WeChat public account. After the reservation is made, the wishing card will be collected at the ticket office of the scenic spot, and the wishing card will be posted on the Tonghai Promenade at the end of the day; if it is not possible to go to the scenic spot, the scenic staff will help. Especially in the later stages of the pandemic, tourists took this opportunity to wish "healthy and safe", and the reputation of Chengshantou scenic spot has been significantly improved. At the same time, Xixiakou's online wishing by tourists and the offline operation of staff have greatly improved the satisfaction of tourists with the services of Xixiakou Scenic Area.

3.1.4 Disaster Management or Future Preparedness

The pandemic was not completely over when Xixiakou Scenic Area reopened. Considering the safety of tourists, the scenic area has adopted a series of measures in terms of management, including closing indoor venues, opening only outdoor attractions, contactless ticket sales, limiting daily reception, real-name appointments, body temperature detection, safety distance control, carpet disinfection, and most of the publicity and marketing work are placed on the online platform mainly based on WeChat public accounts. The indoor dolphin show in the Shendiaoshan Wildlife Park was cancelled, the Chengshantou Hall in the Chengshantou Scenic Area was closed, and many anti-pandemic and disinfection supplies were placed in other outdoor attractions, and an isolation room was set up to deal with the recurrence of the COVID-19.

3.2 Questionnaire Investigation

From February 29 to September 30, 2020, the scenic area received more than 200,000 tourists. Most of the tourists came from Weihai City and surrounding areas, and nearly 100 tourists came from other provinces and cities. Although in terms of the number of tourists, the number of tourists in the Xixiakou tourist area after the pandemic has not recovered to one-fifth of the normal year, but compared with other surrounding tourist attractions, 200,000 visitors are already a very good performance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Xixiakou Scenic Area stopped receiving tourists from January 23 to February 28, 2020. During the suspension of business for more than a month, to prepare for the opening of the park and improve the satisfaction of the scenic area, Xixiakou Scenic Area has set up a special questionnaire platform for projects in the scenic area, tourism products, marketing activities, and travel-related resources in the jurisdiction. Full details of the questionnaire are given in Appendix A. To use the questionnaire data to understand tourists' travel needs during the pandemic period and their opinions and suggestions on Xixiakou Scenic Area, the questionnaire data is sorted out (see Appendix B).

In accordance with the social demographic part, 62 questionnaires were filled out by tourists from other provinces among the 313 valid sample data, especially from Beijing, Hebei, and Inner Mongolia, except Shandong Province. Most of the tourists from outside the province were from Beijing, Hebei, and Inner Mongolia; the other 251 questionnaires were filled out by tourists from within Shandong Province, of which Weihai Tourists from the city accounted for 53.67%, and tourists from other cities in Shandong mainly came from Jinan, Qingdao, and Yantai. The age group is mainly middle-aged, the overall educational background ratio is low, and the income is mainly middle-income. These tourists are all followers of the Xixiakou WeChat official account, and they understand the Xixiakou tourist area to some extent and are suitable research objects.

From the analysis of the questionnaire, we can see that about half of old people have travel needs, which indicates that the silver hair market will have a certain development space. These potential tourists are more willing to take the elderly to travel by car, and most of these elderlies live in rural areas. Survey data on tourist travel plans during the end of the pandemic shows that in the three months after the end of the pandemic, 47.28% of potential tourists have travel plans, slightly less than the proportion of tourists who have no travel plans. In terms of tourist information acquisition channels, the most important information acquisition channel for tourists is to obtain scenic spot information from the Web browsing, followed by friend introductions, mobile phones or other app advertisements, and travel agencies. In terms of tourism motivation, nearly 70% of tourists are for leisure and entertainment, followed by accompanying relatives and friends. Tourists taking sojourn as their destination account for only 13.42%; when tourists choose attractions, they are obviously more attracted to unique attractions and reputation, preferential policies, distance, and are very interested in large-scale activities. In terms of budget, 41.53% of tourists have a

budget of more than 2,000 yuan, and only 11.50% have a budget of less than 500 yuan. According to the survey of Xixiakou tourist area, 77.63% of the people who have been to Xixiakou scenic area, 47.74% of the tourists are very satisfied with the scenic spot, only 1.65% of the tourists expressed dissatisfaction, they suggested that they charge extra for the scenic spot projects, ticket prices are too high, the theme of scenic tours is vague, and the phenomenon of soliciting money is serious. 60.49% of tourists said that they plan to travel to Xixiakou after the pandemic. Self-driving trips with family and friends and traveling alone are the best choices. Fisherman's Food Festival featured customs and folk activities, and Shendiaoshan Animal World Animal Science Knowledge Competition are the activities that most tourists look forward to in Xixiakou Scenic Area.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Travel is requisite for tourism activity; however, outbreak of COVID-19 restricted travel that may have a profound impact on the tourism industry (Yeh, 2020). Although uncertainty remained prevalent in the trajectory of the infection rate as well as in associated trends in tourism, through the lifting of travel restrictions and the continual administration of vaccines, a path to recovery was shown to be evident (Vermeulen-Miltz et al., 2022). In addition, the efforts to reopen some destinations in China have paid off with some encouraging achievements, which inspires other tourism destinations to explore a more adaptive approach to cope with destination recovery after pandemic. Therefore, this study selected Xixiakou Scenic Area, a successful practice, as a case study to explore how a tourism destination can recover from pandemic when it reopens. It is concluded that Xixiakou Scenic Area took a series of online measures to wake tourists' confidence, but also did effective crisis management offline.

What can be included from the result is that self-driving tours will become a tour preference when the pandemic is controlled. The Xixiakou tourist area can seize the opportunity to attract tourists through Internet promotion and word-of-mouth marketing, expand the market, and consider targeting the elderly market. Xixiakou tourist area also needs to optimize the ticket prices, other project fees, and the promotion of scenic spots and historical sites to attract more tourists. To enhance tourist satisfaction, tourist areas need to continue to improve in terms of service quality and level, infrastructure, network promotion, and event organization. What's more, it is proposed to improve the overall quality of service personnel, clean up the sanitation of scenic spots, increase preferential efforts, establish regional preferential policies, set up rest areas, and set up pergola opinions on shading and increasing network publicity.

4.1 Managerial Implications

On the one hand, the tourism market is not averse to disaster recovery promotional activities, that is a concern often considered by destination marketers when planning their post-disaster recovery campaigns (Walters & Mair, 2012). However, a key part of managing recovery of tourism destinations is restoring the destination image and reputation which can be affected by negative or inaccurate media coverage (Khazai et al., 2018); there is no doubt that Xixiakou destination successfully implemented abundant marketing activities to convey positive information. Xixiakou tourist area held virtual tourism activities like public welfare science class positively influenced people's on-site destination choices, thus scenic spot managers are suggested to use virtual tourism as an effective marketing tool to promote destinations and a platform to sell souvenirs and products (Lu et al., 2021). Satisfied communication is a key to successfully combat pandemic for the survival of tourism industry when dealing with the factor that hinders traveling, and that is achieved by their official Wechat account used as the main social media platform (Yeh, 2020). Thereby, it is helpful for destination to apply mainstream media platform used by the target groups to communicate with tourists. Moreover, respondents in this study were mostly from surrounding cities, which is in accordance with the finding of Li et al., (2021) that the attraction radiuses of tourist destinations shrank significantly, and tourist markets became more concentrated, which indicates basing the recovery on proximity tourism is a valid option. Despite domestic tourists' booking intentions decreased as a result of a surge in COVID-cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be improved positively by retentive advertising, discounting and flexible cancellation policies (Volgger et al., 2021), which is also proved by the discount promotion of Xixiakou tourist attraction.

On the other hand, COVID-19 has generated an unprecedented level of public fear, that not only tourism industry recovery is likely to be impeded after the pandemic is over, but also 'travel fear' can evoke different coping strategies, which leads adoption of cautious travel behaviors eventually (Zheng et al., 2021). Given that the fear of pandemic can impact travelers' willingness to travel and the conditions and preferences for vacation destinations, Xixiakou Scenic Area attempt to utilize a health-related destination image as well as proactive communication to ease tourists under anxiety and concerns, that enlightens tourism businesses should further enhance their hygiene conditions to restore confidence when confronted with a cautious clientele (Or ñdaru et al., 2021). Similarly, employees with psychological strain caused by the pandemic may not provide satisfactory services to tourists. To guarantee tourism

service quality, destination managers are suggested to care about employees and help them to release pressure, as negative psychological factors can decrease job satisfaction (Kong et al., 2018). Furthermore, AI became a focus for researchers, tourism health monitoring system may be developed with the help of AI to minimize infection risk from public health events like COVID-19 (Kong et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). When reopen spot, Xixiakou Scenic Area adopted many approaches like contactless facilities and temperature detection device to avoid health risks faced by tourists and employees to a large extent. Hence destination marketers are recommended to restore safety perceptions among tourists after the onslaught of the pandemic in virtue of smart tourism technologies in reducing the impact of pandemics on tourists' perceptions (Masroor & Shiva, 2023). Nevertheless, beware that managers should provide proper support to overcome AI's threat to human resources due to the adverse effect of AI on human capital (Kong et al., 2021). Given this, it is suggested that destination managers can contribute to career satisfaction via career appraisal, career development, or career training (Kong et al., 2012).

4.2 Limitation and Future

Social demographic data demonstrates tourists from Shandong Province in our sample of respondents occupied 80 percent above. In line with Bu et al. (2021), the closer to the scenic spot the visitors live, the higher the satisfaction. In this sense, lack of data from different groups of tourists in other areas, the findings may not be applicable to other geographical or cultural groupings. Similarly, the results reflect the responses of a population that are less educated middle age with middle income and that have knowledge about Xixiakou Scenic Area, which may lead the results are not generalizable to the population as a whole. It's worth noting that the pandemic is coming under control increasingly, as a result, regulations of pandemic lockdowns are constantly changing. Additionally, Xixiakou Scenic Area has natural advantages that its tourism resources can be easily linked to health theme, that is, rural and natural scenic spots such as Xixiakou Scenic Area can obtain new opportunities in the short term, simultaneously they recovered faster than other types of attraction. Consequently, successful experience of this case can contribute more to similar kinds of destinations instead of all spots. It is suggested to examine restoration measure aiming at COVID-19 mentioned by this case in other attractions flexibly in the future.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire on Market Service of Xixiakou Scenic Spot

Dear friends: Hello, we are Xixiakou Scenic Area (Shendiaoshan Wildlife World, Chengshantou, Hailu Island, Motianling Scenic Area). Due to the impact of the COVID-19, the scenic area has stopped receiving reception on January 23, 2020. The resumption of reception of tourists will be notified in other time. To prepare for the opening of the park, provide tourists and partners with better scenic services, and improve scenic satisfaction, during this period, this questionnaire is specially set up for the projects in the scenic area, tourism products, marketing activities, and tourism-related resources in the jurisdiction. The questionnaire is registered and anonymous. Your true thoughts and suggestions are very important to us. Please fill in objectively and truthfully. Your information will be highly confidential. Thank you for your support!

Q1: Your address

Province:

City:

District/County:

Q2: Your gender

Male

Female

Q3: Your age

Under 18

18~24 years old

25~30 years old

31~40 years old

41~50 years old

51~60 years old

61 years old and above

Q4: Does the elderly at home have travel needs?

Yes

No

Q5: Which way do you expect the elderly to choose to travel?

Drive by myself

A short-day trip with friends

By bus or bus

Drive alone

Other

Q6: Do the elderly live in rural areas or cities?

Rural area

Township

Counties

Q7: Your occupation?

Civil servants and public institution personnel

Corporate employees

Teachers and medical staff

Freelancers

Student

Retirees and others

Q8: Your monthly income?

Less than 3000 yuan

3000-5000 yuan

5000-10000 yuan

More than 10,000 yuan

Q9: Your educational background?

High school and below

College

Undergraduate

Postgraduate and above

Q10: Do you have a travel plan in the past three months after the end of the COVID-19?

Yes

No

Q11: In what ways do you usually learn about the information of scenic spots?

Travel agency

Outdoor Advertising

Mobile phone and other app ads

Friend introduced

Web browsing

Q12: What is your usual purpose for visiting the scenic spot?

Relax

Sojourn

Holiday with family and friends

Long insight, eye-opener

Other

Q13: Which aspects do you concerned about more when selecting scenic spots?

Distance

Preferential policiy

Reputation

Unique attraction

Large-scale activity

Other

Q14: What is your budget for a trip?

Less than 500 yuan

500-1000 yuan

1000-2000 yuan

More than 2000 yuan

Q15: Have you ever visited Xixiakou Scenic Area?

Yes

No

Q16: What is your overall evaluation of Xixiakou Scenic Area?

Very satisfied

Satisfaction

Basically satisfied

Dissatisfaction and suggestions

Q17: What are the reasons why you don't know or have not visited Xixiakou Scenic Area?

Never heard of that

Far away

No time

There are better similar scenic spots nearby

Other

Q18: Do you have any plan to visit Xixiakou Scenic Spot after the COVID-19 is over?

Yes

No

Q19: After the COVID-19 is over, which travel mode will you choose to come to the scenic spot?

With the group

Travel by car with family and friends

Travel alone

Other

Q20: What activities do you hope to hold in Xixiakou Scenic Spot?

Featured customs and folk activities

Shendiaoshan Animal World Animal Science Knowledge Competition

Sports events

Fisherman's Food Festival

Other

Q21: Other opinions and suggestions:

The questionnaire was sent to tourists and potential tourists who are concerned about Xixiakou Scenic Area through the WeChat official account, which aroused the attention of those who filled out the questionnaire to Xixiakou Scenic Area and was also a way of publicizing Xixiakou Scenic Area. The questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of February 2020 and stopped in late February 2020. A total of 313 valid questionnaires were received.

Appendix B. Results of the Questionnaire

Like the main text, an appendix may include headings and subheadings as well as tables, figures, and displayed equations. Number each appendix table and figure, and number displayed equations if necessary for later reference; precede the number with the letter of the appendix in which it is included (e.g., Table A1). In a sole appendix, which is not labeled with a letter, precede all tables, figures, and equation numbers with the letter A to distinguish them from those of the main text.

Table B1. Social Demographic

	Scale	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Address	Shandong Province	168	53.67
	Wei Hai District	83	26.51
	Other District	62	19.81
Gender	Other provinces	134	42.81
	Male	179	57.19
Age	Female	27	8.63
	18~24 years old	64	20.45
	25~30 years old	133	42.49
	31~40 years old	68	21.73
	41~50 years old	17	5.43
	51~60 years old	4	1.27
Occupation	61 years old and above	30	9.58
	Civil servants and public institution personnel	130	41.53
	Corporate employees	16	5.11
	Teachers and medical staff	106	33.87
	Freelancers	8	2.55
	Student	23	7.35
Monthly Income	Retirees and others	72	23.00
	Less than 3000 yuan	125	39.94
	3000-5000 yuan	84	26.84
	5000-10000 yuan	32	10.22
Educational Background	More than 10,000 yuan	112	35.78
	High school and below	93	29.71
	Undergraduate	88	28.12
	College	20	6.39
	Postgraduate and above		

Table B2. Questionnaire Results

	Scale	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Does the elderly at home have travel needs?	Yes	168	53.67	
	No	145	46.33	
Which way do you expect the elderly to choose to travel?	Drive by myself	112	66.78	
	A short-day trip with friends	26	15.47	
	By bus or bus	11	6.55	
	Drive alone	6	3.57	
	Other	13	7.74	
Do the elderly live in rural areas or cities?	Rural area	62	36.90	
	Township	70	41.67	
	Counties	36	21.43	
Do you have a travel plan in the past three months after the end of the COVID-19?	Yes	148	47.28	
	No	165	52.72	
In what ways do you usually learn about the information of scenic spots?	Travel agency	85	27.15	
	Outdoor Advertising	42	13.42	
	Mobile phone and other app ads	119	38.01	
	Friend introduced	134	42.81	
	Web browsing	157	50.16	
What is your usual purpose for visiting the scenic spot?	Relax	217	69.33	
	Sojourn	42	13.42	
	Holiday with family and friends	179	57.19	
	Long insight, eye-opener	116	37.06	
	Other	20	6.39	
Which aspects do you concerned about more when selecting scenic spots?	Distance	119	38.01	
	Preferential policy	122	38.97	
	Reputation	130	41.53	
	Unique attraction	213	68.05	
	Large-scale activity	44	14.06	
What is your budget for a trip?	Other	18	5.75	
	Less than 500 yuan	36	11.50	
	500-1000 yuan	70	22.36	
	1000-2000 yuan	77	24.60	
More than 2000 yuan		130	41.53	
	Have you ever visited Xixiakou Scenic Area?	Yes	243	77.63
	No	70	22.36	
What is your overall evaluation of Xixiakou Scenic Area?	Very satisfied	116	47.74	
	Satisfaction	73	30.04	
	Basically satisfied	50	20.57	

	Dissatisfaction and suggestions	4	1.65
Do you have any plan to visit Xixiakou Scenic Spot after the COVID-19 is over?	Yes	147	60.49
	No	96	39.51
After the COVID-19 is over, which travel mode will you choose to come to the scenic spot?	With the group	13	8.02
	Travel by car with family and friends	94	58.02
	Travel alone	45	27.78
	Other	10	6.18
What activities do you hope to hold in Xixiakou Scenic Spot?	Featured customs and folk activities	81	25.87
	Shendiaoshan Animal World Animal Science Knowledge Competition	69	22.04
	Sports events	31	9.90
	Fisherman's Food Festival	83	26.51
	Other	3	0.95

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