

City Marketing Campaigns of Grand Canal Cities: A Case Study of Hangzhou

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Abstract: The Grand Canal of China links onshore cities from north to south, from Beijing to Hangzhou. More canal cities are now realizing the value of city marketing with this heritage as a catalyst for revitalization. This paper aims at evaluating the marketing campaigns launched by those cities, especially Hangzhou as an example, examining how effective those campaigns are and what is a sustainable way for formulating and launching city marketing campaigns in the future. Furthermore, as the wealthiest city among the grand canal cities, this paper will look into the obligations that Hangzhou has in promoting the entire line for tourism development. The findings revealed that citizens are hardly aware of the marketing initiatives of Hangzhou city, with the majority of respondents having never seen any campaigns or official documents related to city marketing in Hangzhou. Despite the fact that Hangzhou city is an attractive destination among the canal cities, its fame and reputation do not correspond with its city marketing efforts. It is suggested that Hangzhou city should use its natural resources to market the city in various ways and attract different resources inflow to help the city achieve sustainable development in the long run.

Keywords: Grand Canal; City marketing campaign; UNESCO heritage; Tourism marketing

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1. Introduction

The Grand Canal of China is divided into three sections: the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, which is the most well-known section of the Grand Canal, the Sui-Tang Grand Canal, and the Zhedong Grand Canal ^[1]. These three sections together constitute one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites – the Grand Canal of China ^[2]. However, this paper mainly focuses on the most well-known section, which is the Hangzhou-Beijing Grand Canal.

The history of the Grand Canal can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn Period as well as the Warring States Period, when King Fuchai of Wu plotted a war with Qi; in order to transport troops and provisions, he ordered people to dig the first canal, which is also known as ‘Han Gou’ in history ^[3]. The successful opening of this canal aided Fuchai in defeating Qi and achieving a huge triumph ^[3]. This history was recorded in the “The Records of the Grand Historian” ^[1], which is the most credible historical record in China. The first historical record about the canal is the opening of the canal by King Fuchai of Wu, which is the ‘Han Gou’ as mentioned above. This canal connects the Yangtze River and the Huai River, with a length of about 200 kilometers ^[1]. “Han Gou” still exists, but its waterway has been shortened to around 1.45 kilometers due to years of disuse, and it is now primarily used for sightseeing ^[1].

The rulers of the late Warring States Period and the Han Dynasty continued to build several canals, connecting numerous waterways, large and small, which laid the foundation for the later complete passage^[4]. During the Sui Dynasty, the economic center was still in the south, but the political center was in the north. In order to have better control over the whole country, in 605 AD, Emperor Yang of Sui Dynasty ordered more than 100,000 people to reconstruct the Han Gou, and in 608 AD, they dug the Yongji Canal^[1], linking the Yellow River and Huai River. This marked the accomplishment of the first full line of canals in Chinese history^[5].

During the Tang Dynasty, the canals dug during the Sui Dynasty were still used, and some new regional canals were also dug on this basis. Over the years, the river fell into disrepair due to the frequent wars between the Song and Jin Dynasties, and its sediments progressively obstructed the river and hampered navigation. During that dynasty, the Yellow River overflowed numerous times, causing flooding in many cities and the canal system to lose its original function^[1].

During the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongols occupied China and set capital in Beijing^[3]. The political center was in the north, while the economic center was in the south. In order to maintain their governance, the emperors considered to dredge the canals. In 1289, the Yuan emperor authorized the reopening of two more canals, making the original curved canals straighter and shortening the route by nearly 500 kilometers^[1]. This marked is the second time in history that the entire Grand Canal line has been opened.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the capital was still in Beijing, and the canals of the Yuan Dynasty were used, since the canal from Hangzhou to Beijing brought great convenience to the management of the feudal dynasty. During the late Qing period, the government did not pay attention to managing the canals as the country was gradually declining. As a result, the canals were gradually blocked. The canal progressively lost its advantages when the taxation system was changed to direct cash payment and the railroad was built^[6].

During the Republican period, governments changed frequently, canal cleanup matters were neglected, and canal redevelopment agendas were not taken into account by the government until the new government was established in 1949^[7].

On June 22, 2014, the Grand Canal of China was successfully enlisted on the World Heritage List at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Doha, Qatar^[1]. The historical and cultural values of the Grand Canal have been recognized worldwide, the significance of which is not only to protect the world's traditional cultural heritage, but also to make the most of traditional cultural heritage and assist these canal cities in implementing city marketing campaigns and sustainable development strategies.

2. Development of city marketing in China

Cities launch city marketing campaigns to attract all kinds of resources, so as to maintain their competitiveness in the global arena^[8].

The development of city marketing in China can be divided into three phases. The first phase is the period before 1980s, and the second is from 1980 to 2000, and the third phase is after the year 2000 till now. The city marketing is still developing, and it can be further divided based on different considerations. In this paper, the first phase is set before the 1980s. The reason for the dividing approach before 1980s is that China at that time had not opened to the world. There were no personal visitor visas for international guests, and although the government might have had invited several foreign government heads and medias, they were only for diplomatic reasons to show the world what a new Chinese government look like, in order to prevent unnecessary misunderstandings^[9]. That kind of tourism is not for ordinary people; thus, neither the state nor the local government had paid attention to city marketing to promote the cities and attract more visitors or investors at that time. During the 1990s, things changed drastically; the Chinese government decided to open to the world and offer personal visitor visas to those visiting China. With the influx of

tourists, several cities began realizing the importance of tourism. It does not only attract people, but also bring opportunities, thus creating more work positions and lower unemployment rates. It also stimulates local economy and assist related industries in developing. Since then, many cities had the idea to market themselves. This phase is the awakening period for cities in China. The third phase is from 2000 till now. Since the realization of the importance of city marketing, cities, particularly those with more natural and heritage resources, have competed with each other for the limited attention and resources, in order to advance city prosperity and development in the long run.

3. Objectives and research questions

This paper aims at analyzing the effectiveness of city marketing campaigns of Hangzhou city and its responsibilities. In order to achieve these objectives, two questions need to be considered:

- (1) **Q1:** Is Hangzhou capable of being a leader in promoting Grand Canal cities, as evidenced by GDP data and a SWOT analysis of the city?
- (2) **Q2:** Are the city marketing campaigns effective for marketing cities like Hangzhou to the target customers?

4. Methodology

First, a SWOT analysis of Hangzhou city has been conducted to reveal the city's strengths, weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats faced by Hangzhou. How would these factors influence Hangzhou in launching city marketing campaigns? Following that, a convenience sampling questionnaire has been conducted to test the effectiveness of the city marketing campaigns launched by Hangzhou city. The input from the questionnaires was collected on Wenjuanxing platform.

5. Performance of Hangzhou city

5.1. SWOT analysis of Hangzhou city

In terms of strengths, Hangzhou has always been a prosperous and well-known city in the history of China, thus its prestige and historical value are higher than those of other canal cities. Alibaba Group is based in Hangzhou, and it has made a significant economic impact. A company like Alibaba would entice a large number of talents to settle and work there.

In terms of weaknesses, Hangzhou does not appear to prioritize city marketing. Marketing efforts using online platforms, such as Weibo, are trendy for companies looking to market themselves to Chinese clients^[10]. Hangzhou Grand Canal has an official Weibo account; however, it has only 9,360 followers, and comments are rarely seen. Besides that, Hangzhou city appears to have little regard for its population; certain campaigns seemed to have been launched only by the authorities, with no evidence of local residents' engagement.

In terms of opportunities, increasing awareness on a national and worldwide level as well as promoting advancements in economy and technology have created enormous prospects in this area. In addition, the government will pay more attention to and assist potential cities, such as Hangzhou.

In terms of threats, competitions from other potential cities that have launched commendable city marketing campaigns, such as Chengdu, are increasingly intensive. Cities are competing for limited resources, and losing the competition means losing resources and opportunities, both of which are detrimental to the city's sustainable development.

5.2. GDP comparison among Grand Canal cities

Only two canal cities, including the capital city Beijing, which ranked second, and Suzhou, which ranked sixth, are above Hangzhou in the 2020 GDP ranking list of Chinese cities, which ranked eighth; the

remaining canal cities are far behind Hangzhou ^[12].

6. Results

The questionnaire data showed that there are 18 male and 42 female respondents, with female respondents accounting for 70% of the total respondents. Most respondents are between 18 and 25 years of age, accounting for 63.33% of the total sample size, followed by the age group of 31 to 40, having a 20% share in the total questionnaire population. From the questionnaire, 90% of the respondents claimed that they had never followed any official account pertaining to Hangzhou Grand Canal; 53.33% of them had never noticed any marketing campaigns about Hangzhou Grand Canal; 66.67% of the respondents had never seen any government documents or policies related to the Grand Canal. A scale is used to assess the respondents' willingness to travel, invest, study, work, or just simply to stay in Hangzhou, in which 1 denotes not willing at all, and 5 denotes strong willingness. The results showed that the willingness to travel to Hangzhou is very strong, with a mean of 4.4, whereas the willingness to invest is a little lower, with a mean of 3.8; the willingness to study is 4.07, the willingness to work is 3.72, and the willingness to stay is 4.33. From this, it is clear that people are more willing to travel or study there than to invest or work in Hangzhou. There are 85% respondents who are interested in the full line Grand Canal tourism project; out of 60 respondents, there is only one respondent who is not interested in the project, indicating that project is extremely appealing and promising. The respondents are unsure if the canal will influence their decision to visit Hangzhou or not, as the majority chose an average scale point, accounting for 46.67% of the total respondents. The respondents did not give a high rating for the overall canal campaign results of Hangzhou city; the mean score is 3.3, which is neither too low not too high. The majority of respondents believe that Hangzhou is responsible for organizing and leading all canal cities in developing the full line Grand Canal tourism project, which accounts for 70% of all respondents. Of the 70%, 41.67% believe that Hangzhou carries great responsibilities in the project.

7. Discussion

In answering **Q1** (Is Hangzhou capable of being a leader in promoting Grand Canal cities, as evidenced by GDP data and a SWOT analysis of the city?), Hangzhou city is definitely capable and has the potential to be the leading city among all canal cities based on GDP figures. Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed a strong public opinion that Hangzhou should assume key responsibilities in assisting all canal cities to promote full line tourism development. The strong and good city image is important for Hangzhou, since the link between heritages like the Grand Canal and its city image is crucial for future development ^[13]. Based on SWOT analysis, Hangzhou has the capability and should be responsible for the whole marketing process. In order to achieve this goal, the local government should manage marketing campaigns and handle the entire process as efficiently as possible ^[14].

In answering **Q2** (Are the city marketing campaigns effective for marketing cities like Hangzhou to the target customers?), the findings of the study demonstrate that there is little recognition of the efforts in city marketing campaigns by the citizens in real life, with the majority of people failing to notice any of the campaigns launched by Hangzhou city. Many respondents find Hangzhou appealing in various ways, including vacationing, working, and relocating there. That could be attributed to factors other than the Grand Canal or city marketing efforts; for instance, Hangzhou city is one of the most famous cities in China, and despite doing nothing to promote the city, it is still a popular tourist destination. However, even wealthy cities like Hangzhou would not turn down extra resources, thus the perception among potential consumers is crucial ^[15].

8. Conclusion

The development of the Grand Canal is currently a hot topic in China. The central government and local canal city governments are paying more attention to develop their heritages along with launching more city marketing campaigns. Although most citizens are unaware of the efforts, the process is starting to pick up speed; hence, it might take some time to achieve satisfactory marketing results. At the current stage, the marketing efforts are not accurately targeting potential customers, and the government has classified it as an official task with little communication with target customers or local residents. If Hangzhou pays more attention on communication, more resources may flow in. Hangzhou is capable and has the responsibility to assist other canal cities, and if it succeeds, the city should help other canal cities to thrive based on their experiences. The overall development would aid economic development in all canal cities, which would be beneficial and helpful for the country to attain fast recovery from the pandemic.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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