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Marketing evaluation of Pepsi- Cola in China

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1.Executive Summary

This article analyses the marketing strategy of one of the world's largest beverage companies, Pepsi, in China. Companies are set up to make a profit and if they want to make a profit, they need to compete and in order to solve the competition problem, they have to market themselves well. Marketing equates to marketing one's company and also to keep customers (consumers) recognising their brand or brands and meeting their needs. Marketing management is a consumer-oriented process whose objective is to identify and create profitable opportunities, which usually result from satisfying consumers. As one of the first foreign companies to enter the Chinese market, Pepsi has an established supply chain, a clear geographical selection and target customers. Using the PESTEL framework to analyse Pepsi's macro environment in China, it was found that the Political and Economic aspects were well suited to Pepsi's development, while the Sociocultural, Technological, Environmental and Legal aspects required continuous learning and adaptation. Unlike its biggest competitor Coca-Cola's marketing strategy in China, which is all-region and all-age coverage, Pepsi explicitly targets second and third tier cities, targeting the under 16 and 16-30 year olds, and also adopts the 4Is marketing theory, Interesting, Interests, Interaction and The campaign combines several of them. In China, where the internet is growing rapidly, Pepsi has centred its marketing on social media platforms, video platforms and e-commerce platforms, and has achieved good results. The first is the lack of interaction with celebrity endorsers on social media platforms. A keyword search of the content posted on Pepsi's social media platforms reveals that there is little interaction with its celebrity endorsers on social media platforms, except for the posting of endorsers. Secondly, there is a lack of interaction with fans on social media platforms. In the comments section of Pepsi's official social media accounts, there is little to no response from Pepsi to fans' comments. Finally, there is an over-reliance on the celebrity effect. Almost 70% of the

content posted on Pepsi's official social media accounts is related to its celebrity spokesperson and receives a good number of likes, comments and reposts, while other content does not even receive more than 1000 comments. The advice given for this is to firstly improve interaction with celebrity endorsers and fans to form good word of mouth and increase brand loyalty and fan stickiness. The second is to use virtual characters as endorsers, such as IP co-branding, which has a low cost, long duration and can also attract its original audience.

2.Introduction

PepsiCo Beverages North America (PBNA) was founded in 1898 and merged with Frito-Lay North America (FLNA) to form PepsiCo in 1965 (PepsiCo, 2023). By 2022, PepsiCo sells its products in more than 200 countries and territories, employ approximately 291,000 people worldwide and generate net revenues of 86 billion USD in 2022 and 79 billion USD in 2021 (PepsiCo Greater China, 2022).

PepsiCo entered the Chinese market in February 1981 with its first factory in Shenzhen and was one of the first Chinese business partners with the U.S. In 1995, PepsiCo made a major breakthrough in China with the establishment of PepsiCo (China) Investment Ltd. in Shanghai with the approval of the Chinese government (Shen, 2006).

When it comes to Pepsi, we have to mention its old rival: Coca-Cola. Although born only 12 years after Coca-Cola, Pepsi was always considered an imitator of Coca-Cola, and Coca-Cola was always in the lead in terms of market share until Pepsi spent 5 million UDE on Michael Jackson in 1984 to become the brand's spokesperson, and with its strong influence, Pepsi's sales skyrocketed in just one month after the commercial was aired, and the market share of Coca-Cola The ratio of sales between Pepsi and Coca-Cola went from 1:3.4 at the end of World War II to 1:1.15 in 1985 (Brand front page,2021). In 1988, Pepsi signed its first Asian spokesperson, Leslie Cheung, and used Cheung's popularity to successfully open up the Asian market (Signs of age, 2023).

Marketing strategy is critical to an organisation's success and market position and needs to be continually optimised and improved, not only as a way for a company to build and maintain relationships with its target consumers, but also as a means of enhancing the company's ability to innovate and generate revenue (Luo, 2023).

3.Main Finding

3.1The concept and importance of marketing

Marketing management is a consumer-oriented process whose objective is to identify and create profitable opportunities that will typically arise through

satisfying consumers (Instagantt, 2023).

Businesses are set up to make a profit, and if they want to make a profit they need to compete, and to solve the problem of competition they must do a good job of marketing. Marketing is equal to marketing one's company, but also to make customers (consumers) constantly recognise one's brand or brands and to meet their needs (Su,2021).

3.2Pepsi's marketing in China

1. Celebrity endorsements: Use celebrities to quickly increase brand awareness and credibility. Pepsi uses a three-dimensional endorsement strategy to reduce the risk of a single endorser and enrich the brand (Yao,2004). Pepsi has positioned himself as a Coke for young people. Although Pepsi's spokespeople have changed, it is certain that each one of them was a trendsetter at the time (Qingxinlantian, 2020).

2. Localisation strategy: Pepsi initially entered the Chinese market as a foreign brand that was noticed by consumers, but as the cultural confidence of Chinese consumers increased, Pepsi also began to turn Chinese to better capture the hearts and minds of Chinese consumers (Quanweipai, 2021). As Chinese New Year is the most important traditional festival in China, PepsiCo has created the "Bringing Happiness Home" short video IP for the 10th consecutive year by gaining insight into the emotional needs of Chinese people going home for Chinese New Year, combining brand marketing with Chinese culture (Chuangkewang, 2023).

3. A concern for health: As health concerns continue to rise, consumer acceptance of and demand for sugar-free beverages continues to rise. According to the China Sugar Free Drinks Industry Research and Consumer Insights Report 2023, the market size of sugar free drinks in China has grown from 2.26 billion CNY in 2015 to 19.96 billion CNY in 2022 (Wang, 2023). Pepsi launched Sugar Free Cola in China in 2017 and this forward-thinking marketing strategy has put Pepsi in good stead for the sugar-free boom that will emerge

in China in 2019 (FBIF, 2023).

3.3Pepsi's macro and micro marketing environment

3.3.1Micro environment

1. Customer: China has a broad consumer base, with the younger generation, especially students and working professionals, being the main consumers of Pepsi. As health awareness continues to rise in recent years, Pepsi needs to put more thought into its sugar-free range.
2. Supply Chain: Pepsi has been in China for over 40 years and has a well-established production and distribution network, but fluctuations in the global economy can cause problems such as fluctuations in raw material prices (He,2010).
3. Competitors: Apart from Coca-Cola, the biggest competitor, there are also Nongfu Shanquan and Unity Group in China, especially tea drinks from local Chinese companies, which will become new competitors to Pepsi's sugar-free drinks.

3.3.2Macro environment

The PESTEL framework is often used to analyse the macro environment of a company and consists of six factors: Political, Economic, Sociocultural, Technological, Environmental and Legal (LibreTexts, 2022).

1. Political: The international marketing strategies developed by companies and their implementation require the relative stability of host government policies as a prerequisite. The China Beverage Association conducts beverage industry surveys and provides international training opportunities for industry professionals to support talent development. To ensure the development of the e-commerce industry, reduce payment risks and create a safe Internet environment, the government has enacted regulations such as *The E-Commerce Law of the People's Republic of China* and *The Measures for the Administration of Online Banking Payments*. During the epidemic, China took stringent measures to prevent the epidemic, which led to significant results,

social stability and a sense of security for the people, allowing businesses to operate normally. The political environment in China was suitable for Pepsi to carry out its marketing activities.

2. Economic: China has shifted from high to medium speed development, its economy is the second largest in the world, its residents - with increased disposable income per capita - have increased their willingness and ability to consume. Although people's incomes were lower at the beginning of the epidemic, the consumption scenarios have gradually recovered due to proper epidemic prevention measures, increased awareness and improved prevention mechanisms in various regions. According to the *Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China 2020* (2020) and *Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China 2021* (2021), sales growth in the beverage category was 14% and 20.4% respectively, still The beverage industry is still in a period of high growth. The economic situation in China will continue to be healthy.

3. Sociocultural: People can receive information via the internet, making it more convenient to consume. With the increasing consumer awareness, people are more inclined to choose good brands, high quality and personalised products. The younger generation is becoming financially independent and prefers personalisation, customisation, digitalisation, technology and a focus on quality, environmental protection and health (LearningChronicles, 2023).

4. Technological: During the epidemic, in addition to e-commerce platforms, the fever of live-streaming with goods came to a climax as people began to embrace and love the model, and companies pitched in and began to transform. In terms of products, a single product no longer satisfies a diverse range of consumers, with higher demand for elements such as taste, ingredients and packaging design. Pepsi has a good track record in China in terms of both products and new media (Liu, 2022).

5. Environmental: As environmental awareness increases, companies need to

consider making more reference to the concept of environmental protection in their packaging and promotion, using recyclable materials. In addition to government regulations on carbon emissions for companies, whether a product is environmentally conscious is becoming a factor for consumers in choosing a product.

6. Legal: These include advertising laws, laws and regulations relating to intellectual property rights, and the food safety laws that have received the most attention in recent years, all of which have a significant impact on PepsiCo's operations and require careful study and compliance.

3.4 Target market

As Pepsi's biggest competitor, Coca-Cola entered the Chinese market three years before Pepsi, and the two sides also have major differences in their target markets. Coca-Cola is positioned as: the traditional, classic, time-honoured cola. Pepsi, on the other hand, is positioned as a brand: a cola for young people. Coca-Cola uses an undifferentiated market coverage strategy, with marketing campaigns and target groups throughout China. Pepsi concentrated its resources on second and third tier cities for a major campaign, and the cities chosen were basically cities with a huge and well-developed market for cola-based drinks, with the main target groups being young people under 16 and 16-30 years old (White Collar Illustrated, 2019).

In addition, as young people mostly enjoy sports or follow sporting events, Pepsi has also launched drink products suitable for drinking during sports (Gatorade, Sugar Free Coke, etc.) and will have famous footballers to endorse them during world-class events (Lucio, 2018).



Figure 1: LOVE IT. LIVE IT. FOOTBALL

(<https://insidefmcg.com.au/2018/03/07/pepsi-launches-new-love-it-live-it-football-campaign/>)

From the image we can see that Pepsi has separately invited:

1. Five-time Best Player of the Year and Four-time UEFA Champions League winner, Leo Messi.
2. World-renowned Brazilian defender and back to back UEFA Champions League winner, Marcelo.
3. Three-time UEFA Champions League winner and German midfielder, Toni Kroos.
4. US award-winning playmaker and two-time Women's Best Player of the Year, Carli Lloyd.
5. English rising star and two-time Young Player of the Year, Dele Alli.

In keeping up with the market, Pepsi is once again playing to its strengths: celebrity endorsements.

Pepsi's marketing strategy is based on 4Is theory: Interesting, Interests, Interaction and Individuality.

1. Interesting: such as videoing, creating topics, activities, etc., looking for fun things to do.
2. Interactive: Initiate topics on social media to lead consumers to participate in interaction and motivate them.
3. Interest: resonate with consumers and create a good relationship between companies and consumers.
4. Individuality: by establishing a unique image, spreading the idea of individuality, refining the development of information.

Interesting+Interactive+Interest: In 2019 Pepsi title sponsored *The coming one Super Band*, a very popular program at the time, full of creative and novel content that surprised the audience and increased the interaction between the brand and the audience. Pepsi products and elements were everywhere in the program, and the in-depth scene implantation also brought enough exposure to the brand. At the same time, the show's popularity was used to attract traffic to social media platforms, discussing the content of the show and voting for favorite contestants, which was full of interactive elements and brand exposure (Jingsou, 2020).

Interesting+Individuality+Interest: Pepsi China launched the Pepsi UTC Concept Store in 2017 and invited a celebrity spokesperson to promote the partnership. Consumers can participate in a lottery to receive coupons, souvenirs and other activities with the CDK inside the cap of the product. 2018 upgraded again by joining hands with designers popular with young people to create their own hipster peripherals. 2019 is even a collaboration with traditional Chinese brands to launch peripheral products such as bicycles, ping pong bats and shoes. Pepsi has fully achieved to track consumer behavior, fully analyze the psychology and interests of young people, and export their own brand culture (Laura, 2018).



Figure 2: Pepsi Concept Store

(<http://harvestsgroup.com/zh/2018/08/22/pepsi-utc-concept-store-pepsi2018/>)

Interesting+Interactive+Interest: The national trend, one of the most topical cultural phenomena in China, has also involved Pepsi. In addition to the aforementioned collaboration with traditional Chinese brands, Pepsi also launched the TAICHI series of colas based on Chinese tastes, containing the White Peach Oolong flavor, the Osmanthus flavor and the White Grapefruit Green Bamboo flavor, respectively. Along with the promotion on social media platforms, the promotional text also set up links that could jump to the store's merchandising counter stores with one click, making it easy for consumers to shop (Chuangkewang,2023).

3.5 Selection of media

With the rapid development of the Internet in China, Pepsi has adopted digital media as its main marketing channel. These include social media platforms (e.g. Tik Tok, Weibo, WeChat, etc.) , online video platforms (Tencent Video, AIQIYI, Youku, etc.) and e-commerce platforms.

1. Social media platforms: Weibo is one of China's leading social media platforms, positioned similarly to Twitter but with greater user privacy. Pepsi's official Weibo numbers are mainly divided by region, with official accounts in

different regions responsible for promoting and marketing products in their respective regions. Topics are initiated online and campaigns are promoted offline to enhance the marketing effect.

Account Name	Number of followers	Number of weibo posts	Last update date
Pepsi China	1,019,000	8062	05 July 2023
Pepsi South China	132,000	4773	06 July 2023
Pepsi Fujian	379,000	434	06 July 2023
Pepsi Chongqing	33,000	1932	21 June 2023
Pepsi Beijing	18,000	242	02 June 2023
Pepsi Shandong	12,000	477	28 June 2023
Pepsi Shanghai	13,000	2233	19 June 2023
Pepsi Henan	133,000	2497	06 July 2023

Table 1: Pepsi China Weibo key member account information

(<https://s.weibo.com/user/%E7%99%BE%E4%BA%8B%E5%8F%AF%E4%B9%90>)

The above table is compiled by the author from Weibo. Pepsi China has created its own fan group, which is mostly used to post fan benefits, but the group only has 18 people. In addition, some regional accounts also have accounts that are not maintained in a timely manner. One of the Pepsi endorsers recently broke out in a scandal, but some regional accounts still have a picture of the endorser on their home page content. Even the largest official account, Pepsi China, has only 65 reposts, 96 comments and 1,086 likes on its most recent post, with the previous posts having only single-digit retweets and comments, and less than triple-digit likes. Social media interaction with celebrity endorsers is also lacking, with both accounts interacting almost exclusively on the day the spokesperson is posted.

2. Online video platforms: The marketing of video platforms relies mainly on

advertising, and title sponsorship of specific programmes. Some popular programmes or platform-owned programmes and their derivative content require users to become paid VIPs to watch them (or watch them in advance), and more and more people are willing to pay for quality content. VIP users will automatically skip ads so advertising on video platforms has become much less effective than before (Wang, 2022). Becoming the title sponsor of a programme is a popular marketing direction in recent years. The content of the programme is verbally promoted and advertised for the title sponsor several times, even for paid VIP subscribers, who can only skip the title advertisements in the programme. It will also involve brands interacting with users on social media platforms during the show's hit period, creating a buzz on social platforms and increasing attention and exposure.

3. E-commerce platforms: The marketing of e-commerce platforms is mainly through the addition of keywords for products, advertising links on the home page of the platform and other ways to attract traffic, to increase the number of visits to the shop, the number of commodity views, collections, to solve the traditional problem of low efficiency of word-of-mouth. Pepsi ranked third in the 2022 beverage e-commerce platform sales ranking, with total sales of 7.24 million units and sales of over 280 million RMB (Whale Staffing E-Commerce Big Data, 2022).

3.6 Measuring success

In order to measure the effectiveness of a promotion, several dimensions can be analyzed, such as sales, market share, and consumer engagement.

Taking the TAICHI series marketing as an example, Pepsi promoted the White Peach Oolong flavored cola on April 12, 2021 and released promotional videos on the Weibo of its two popular celebrity endorsers, Deng Ziqi and Li Xian, which received 45,000 reposts, 11,000 comments, 90,000 likes and 1,000,000+ reposts, 228,000 comments and 1,090,000 likes. The massive consumer engagement fully illustrates the marketing's success.



Figure 3: Screenshot of Deng Ziqi's Weibo



Figure 4: Screenshot of Li Xian's Weibo

Taking the title sponsorship program as an example, Pepsi sponsored *The coming one Super Band*, the program's social platform accounts gained a total of 577,000 fans and the cumulative video play count was 18,064,000, and the program reached a staggering 240 million plays on the video platform. From the eye-catching Pepsi logo above the show's title, to watching the show is the ubiquitous products and Pepsi elements around, this marketing has undoubtedly brought Pepsi a huge brand exposure.

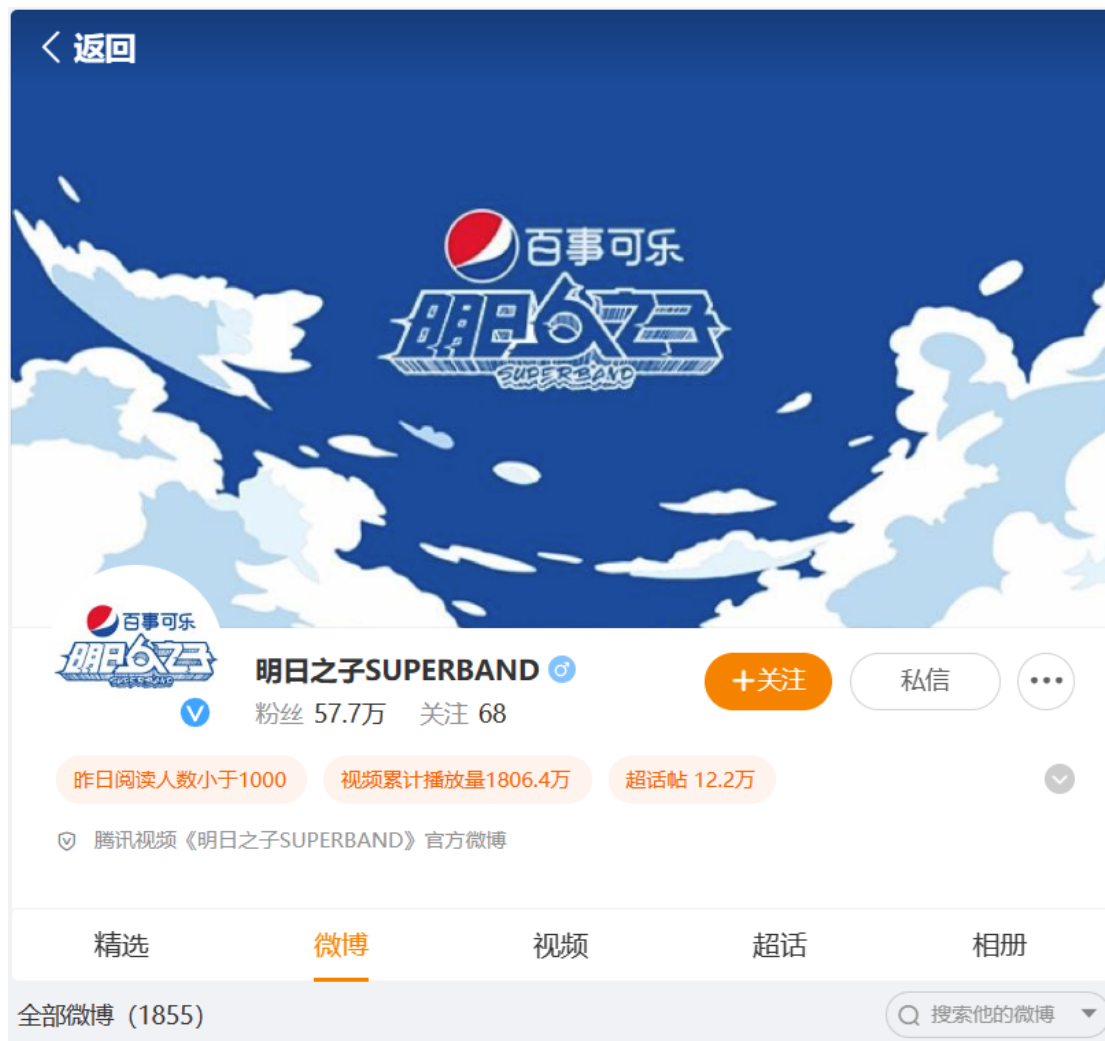


Figure 5: The Screenshot of Li The coming one Super Band's Weibo

All the marketing is to create more revenue. The title sponsorship of *The coming one Super Band* was in 2020 and the launch of white peach Oolong flavored cola was in 2021, and the sales in the two years reached 64.46 million RMB (Youcaicaiyou,2021) and 333.57 million RMB (Lieyunwang, 2022) respectively,

which also successfully rose from the sixth place to the third place in the annual sales ranking of beverage category. It's easy to see that Pepsi's marketing in China is undoubtedly a success.

4. Conclusions

Pepsi's marketing strategy in China has been successful, but there are still many problems.

- **Lack of social media platform interaction with celebrity endorsers:** Although Pepsi has many celebrity endorsers, there is not much social media interaction with the stars, almost only on the day the endorsement is released.
- **Lack of interaction with fans:** Almost every post released by PepsiCo's official account on social media platforms is not interacted with by fans in the comment section, which leads to a decrease in fan stickiness and brand loyalty.
- **Over-reliance on star effect:** Almost 70% of the content posted on Pepsi's social media platforms is related to its celebrity endorsers, and the number of reposts, comments, and likes for content that does not include celebrity endorsers plummets, even to less than 1,000. This leads to fans buying products that focus on the celebrity spokesperson rather than the product itself, and once the celebrity spokesperson has negative news, the brand image is quickly damaged.

5. Recommendation

- **Increased interaction with celebrity endorsers and fans:** The PepsiCo operations team should repost more often and comment on content related to their own products that fans upload to social media, with the more outstanding content being given away as benefits such as products or coupons. In addition, feedback content from regular users is more convincing than advertisements. Timely replies to fans' comment content will help to create good word-of-mouth and increase consumers' trust in the company and its brand (Wang, 2019).

- **Use existing virtual character for marketing campaigns:**fiction character refers to the use of computer technology to realize virtual characters in code. Compared to celebrity endorsements, virtual characters are cost effective and have a long life span (Squirrel Factory, 2022). IP co-branding is a more common form of marketing, using anime or game characters to endorse and promote products. This method can attract its original audience users, but sometimes there are cases where they cannot be successfully converted into brand fans. When choosing a virtual character to work with, it is important to not only pursue the popularity of the virtual character, but to fully integrate the virtual character with the brand, and to strengthen communication with fans during the marketing process to give them a sense of belonging and thus increase brand loyalty.

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