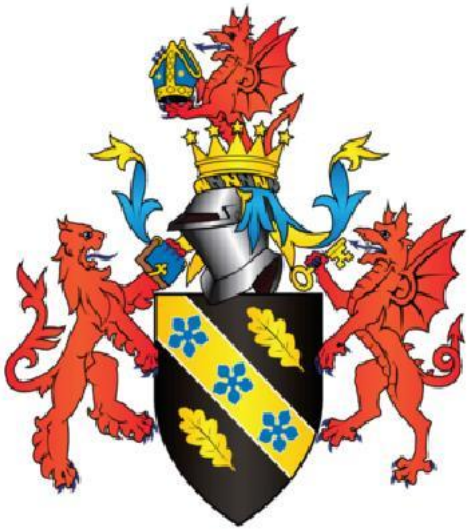
Develop a customer care based strategy for ‘Starbucks’



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Executive Summary

Starbucks has always been a global leader in coffee, but with the impact of the epidemic and the economic downturn, Starbucks (especially in the Chinese market) is also facing a weak market and a significant decline in revenue. This assignment aims to set out the history and background of Starbucks and In addition, through PESTEL analysis, SWOT analysis, 7Ps analysis and Porter's Five Forces analysis, it makes a comprehensive analysis of Starbucks' Chinese market, and gives conclusions and recommendation.

1. Introduction

Background

Starbucks begins in 1971 and it was Seattle where opened its first store(starbucks.com, 2023). By 2007, most coffee consumers were aware of the Starbucks Coffee brand, and millions of consumers from all walks of life enjoyed the offered products and experience (Koehn et al., 2008).

In 2014, Fortune magazine named Starbucks the fifth-most admired brand in the world. Starbucks rank number one in the food service industry (Fortune, 2014).

Along the way, Starbucks has gotten gargantuan. Founded by entrepreneur Howard Schultz, several strategic initiatives including strong brand creation, premium product development, and company expansion to international markets were largely responsible for Starbucks Coffee's specialty coffee marketing strategy during the 1980s and 1990s (Koehn L, 2005).

But Starbucks didn't get to this point smoothly, and the road was full of crises. Although it was once known to consistently attract around 60 million weekly visitors across the globe without cannibalizing its own sales (Michelli J, 2007), its earnings dipped drastically during the April-June quarter of 2008. (York E, 2010). Starbucks began deciding in the second half of 2018 to go into digital and social media to engage with their customers, and found that this played a role in the way they went to market(Schultz and Gordon, 2011).

Social media refers to online services that support social interactions among users through highly accessible and scalable web-based publishing techniques (Dutta S, 2010).

Against the backdrop of recent trends in web technologies, making profitable use of social media is at the top of the agenda for many organizations (Levy M, 2009). Starbucks continuously interacted with its followers on an hourly basis through replies. The reply tool can contribute a significant human touch to a brand. Scholars have also recommended conversational and interactive activities with customers on social media platforms (Kwok & Yu 2013; Park & Kim, 2014).

Without a coherent strategy of engagement and retention through digital channels your business is at best missing a golden opportunity and at worst could be left behind, watching your competitors pull away across an ever-widening digital divide(Damian R. & Calvin J., 2014). Digital social media such as Facebook, Twitter and TIKTOK are commonly used by young people.As the society becomes cognizant of the prowess of social media, organizations which do not utilize services such as Twitter and Facebook are seen to be at a distinct strategic disadvantage (Kuhlen R, 2003).

Twitter is ideal for brands that seek to build relationships with key stakeholders (Hennig Thurau et al., 2010). Starbucks is also prompt in responding to the knowledge acquired from customers, with an average of ten tweets per day (Noff A, 2009).

As the number of people using social media continues to grow and social selling tools evolve, social networks will become increasingly important for product search and e-commerce. For instance, Starbucks issued a 60-second advertisement prior to the 2008 presidential election in the USA, promising a free cup of brewed coffee to every voter. Posting the commercial in a video sharing website, Starbucks jointly used Facebook and Twitter to stimulate its viewership and amplify its effect. Till the day of the election, the video was viewed 419,000 times. In Facebook, it attracted over 400,000 comments while customers were found tweeting on Starbucks every eight seconds (Miller C, 2009). This situation also reflects the importance and power of digital social media.

Of course, promotion and publicity on digital social media is only one way to alleviate the crisis. Throughout the several times that Starbucks has turned a corner, it has closed stores. The company said it plans to close up to 400 stores in the US and Canada over the next 18 months, while at the same time adding carryout and pick-up only locations(Chauncey A, 2020).

Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, most restaurants, fast food chains, and cafes closed their locations and only operate their product through ordering and delivery (Rizou, et. al, 2020). But the impact of the pandemic is far higher than that of the 2008 world financial crisis. The company did not see such an impact on its sales since the 2008-2009 financial crisis (Levine S, 2020).

The epidemic has changed people's lifestyles, shopping habits and even consumption levels due to the economic downturn caused by the epidemic. The pandemic has pushed more shoppers online, with e-commerce now accounting for 16.1% of all U.S. sales, up from 11.8% in the first quarter and this trend is likely to stick, even as brick-and-mortar stores open their doors again(jpmorgan.com, 2020).

As Starbucks grows globally, China accounts for an increasing share of its revenue. The revenue distribution for 2018 was disproportionately distributed with the Americas with 68%, China/Asia Pacific with 18%, EMEA with 4%, Channel Development with 9%, and Corporate/other with 1% (Pratap, 2019).

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to analyze the various sales and operation situations faced by Starbucks after the epidemic and provide solutions and strategies based on the current situation of Starbucks China.

2. Main Findings

Taking advantage of digital social media tools as they begin to take shape can help a company's brand image and marketing. But with the passage of time and the emergence of multi-media tools, digital media alone is no longer enough to impress customers. If Starbucks can utilize its strong research and development abilities, they may be able to strategically place themselves in a

superior position relative to their competitors as the world approaches a full reopening(Conner V. & Neejad & T. Chidiac & Benjamin C, 2021).

Starbucks, the world's largest coffee chain, reported a year-over-year increase of 8.7% in its revenue but a year-over-year decline of 20.9% in its net profits in the third quarter of the fiscal 2022(TMTpost, 2022).

During the pandemic, businesses should pay more attention to customer care, and 21 years of research has found that Starbucks pays attention to customer care, and customer loyalty is still high. This has proven that Starbucks coffee is still the choice of the public even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has a negative impact on everyone, Starbucks coffee serves their customers the best they can(Daisy M. & Sarah A., 2021).

Starbucks remains upbeat about China's coffee market, and plans to double local revenue while adding 50 percent more stores over the next three years (Wang Yanlin, 2022).

In 2020, despite the continued growth rate, annual sales volume remained between 10% and 15%, respectively, significantly higher than the global market's 2% growth rate (kknews.cc, 2018).Rising incomes, increased living standards, and awareness of Western trends by middle class consumers have contributed to increased demand for products such as coffee in China (Wang, 2012).

While far from being one of the largest markets for coffee consumption, China's rapid economic growth since 2000 has increased the demand for coffee, making it one of the most rapidly growing markets for coffee in the world with estimates suggesting annual growth rates of 18% until 2019 (ICO, 2015).

Although Starbucks is very confident in the Chinese market, it is also true that the performance of the Chinese market is weak（Figure 1）. In the third quarter of fiscal 2022, Starbucks reported revenue of $540 million, down 40% year over year, and same-store sales in China fell 44% in the quarter due to customer traffic declines of 43% and average customer unit price declines of 1% (Toutiao.com, 2022).

	Quarter Ended		
($ in millions)	Jul 3, 2022	Jun 27, 2021	Change (%)
Change in Comparable Store Sales (2)	(18)%	41%	
Change in Transactions	(15)%	55%	
Change in Ticket	(4)%	(9)%	
Store Count	17,898	16,543	8%
Revenues	$1,584.7	$1,688.0	(6)%
Operating Income	$135.3	$327.3	(59)%
Operating Margin	8.5%	19.4%	(1,090) bps

Figure 1 Partial results from Starbucks' international segment for the third quarter of fiscal 2022.

There are various reasons for the market decline, and there are many local coffee brands in China now, which have a lot of impact on the Starbucks market, such as Luckin Coffee, Luckin Coffee's headquarters is located in Xiamen, China. It is one of the largest coffeehouse chains in China. It was

founded in 2017 by Jenney Qian Zhiya and Charles Zhengyao Lu in Beijing (Lkcoffee.com, 2023).

A change in Starbucks' strategy is inevitable.

3. Strategic evaluation

（1）External analyses(PESTEL analysis)

a. Political environment.

In recent years, the economic and trade friction between China and the United States has continued, and China's attitude towards American sanctions has become increasingly tough. Since the beginning of July, China-US relations have fallen to a freezing point, with fierce confrontations and conflicts between the two countries in trade, science and technology, human rights, Taiwan, the South China Sea and other fields. The confrontation not only affects the economic and political interests of the two countries, but also threatens global peace and security. In addition, due to the outbreak and spread of COVID-19, global economic activities and exchanges have been seriously disrupted and restricted, resulting in tension and disruption of global supply chains. This has made the impact of the Sino-US confrontation deeper and wider, bringing greater difficulties and losses to the production and consumption of all countries.However, Starbucks is not affected by Sino-US

trade. First of all, the friction in recent years is mainly in the manufacturing industry, high-tech industry, communication industry and other industries, while the catering industry is not affected much. Secondly, Starbucks chooses high-quality coffee beans from Yunnan Province in China, which will also promote the local economy, which is also advocated and supported by the Chinese government. According to media reports, in the past 10 years alone, Starbucks has purchased 56,433 tons of coffee beans in Yunnan, including 99 tons of "the highest quality selected coffee beans."(Xiang Ma, 2023)

b.Economic environment.

Despite China's economic downturn this year, the coffee market has become a counter current. From April to June this year, the domestic coffee group purchase orders soared 250%, and experts estimate that the national coffee market size may exceed 1 trillion yuan by 2025. Affected by favorable factors such as consumption recovery, coffee consumption has continued to grow since this year, and various capital represented by local production and investment, venture capital and listed companies have actively entered the game to seize the coffee economy. In recent years, Kunshan has actively seized the opportunity of "One Belt, One Road" and "Yangtze River Delta integration" national strategy, and introduced more than 30 coffee leading enterprises such as Starbucks and Yizheng Coffee, forming two major coffee industry characteristics of "whole industry chain" and "internationalization"(Geng Haodong, 2023).

c.Social and cultural environment.

In China, coffee culture has gradually become a fashion and lifestyle. Especially in big cities, people increasingly see coffee as a quality of life and a way to socialize.

Here are some characteristics and trends about Chinese coffee drinking culture:

Rapid growth in the number of coffee shops: In recent years, China's coffee market has developed rapidly and the number of coffee shops has been increasing. Large chain coffee shops such as Starbucks, Nestle Coffee and Blue Mountain Coffee are widely present in Chinese cities.

Social and work situations: In China, drinking coffee has become a common habit in social and work situations. Many business negotiations and work meetings take place in coffee shops. In addition, coffee shops have become a place for people to meet and party.

Young people: Young people in China are the main consumer group of coffee. They pursue fashion, freshness and individuality, and are willing to spend more time and money tasting different flavors of coffee in coffee shops, communicating and sharing life with friends.

Diversification of coffee culture: With the popularity of coffee culture in China, people have also begun to explore different coffee cultures and tastes. From espresso to homemade coffees, from lattes to cappuccinos, China's coffee market is diversified and personalized.

The combination of coffee and health: With the emphasis on healthy diet and lifestyle, people are beginning to pay attention to the impact of coffee on health. Some coffee shops have launched a variety of healthy options such as low-sugar, low-fat, and decaffeinated to meet consumer demand.

In general, China's coffee culture is developing rapidly, showing a trend of diversification, personalization and health.

d. Technical natural environment.

With the large number of coffee planted in Yunnan Province, China's coffee planting and cultivation technology is also rapidly improving. When the price of coffee beans is low, customers can choose more types. This is also major good news for coffee operators. But customers will also be more picky in taste and feeling, which also contributes to the premise of healthy development of the industry.

（2）Internal analyses(SWOT analysis)

a. Advantages

Starbucks has many suppliers. In China, it will look for local suppliers and foreign suppliers. This approach has many advantages. Second, the differentiated taste can let more customers choose and seize customers with different needs.

In addition, Starbucks is located in almost every small and medium-sized business district in China, which enables customers to enjoy it everywhere and provides a lot of convenience.

b.Disadvantages

Due to the problem of positioning, Starbucks tends to take the middle and high-end route, and its stores are mostly concentrated in the first and second tier cities. That's what Starbucks used to do. Because Starbucks needs to ensure the number of customers, and store decoration, location selection and employees are also big expenses, it is also an important expense for Starbucks. However, with the impact of the economy, Starbucks began to develop its stores in some small cities to seize the middle and high-end customers in small cities.

c.Opportunity.

In recent years, China's economic boom, rising living standards and rising incomes have led people to seek a higher lifestyle. China has a huge potential coffee market. The spending on coffee in China will be the largest in the world, the coffee market is entering a stage of rapid development. It is expected that in the next few years, China's coffee industry will basically maintain a rapid growth of 25% to 35%, and the national market size is expected to exceed 1 trillion yuan by 2025.

d.Threats.

The good of the industry will also be the entry of competitors. When customers' needs continue to diversify, there will be competitors to seize customers. In order to retain customers, Starbucks needs to pay more attention to the study of customers' thinking and ideas, be more considerate of customers, and realize customer care service from the perspective of customers. As customer expectations continue to rise, companies increasingly compete on service（Eric Buesing & Vinay Gupta & Sarah Higgins & Raelyn Jacobson，2020）.

(3) 7Ps analysis

Products

Starbucks stores mainly sell coffee, but also serve bread, cakes, sandwiches and other refreshments, in addition to coffee beans and general merchandise. In China, there will be Chinese characteristics, such as the sale of Dragon Boat "zongzi" before the Dragon Boat Festival, and breakfast will be served in the morning.

Price

Starbucks is not only selling coffee, but also embodying the concept of Starbucks experience and creating a scene for customers. It can be said that Starbucks sells an experience, a pleasant feeling of leisure in the tired work, which can let busy people have a place to relax. Therefore, the price of Starbucks coffee is higher than that of other coffee shops.

Place

Starbucks' business philosophy is not that the price is too high to be accepted by customers, but more concerned that customers will not pay for the service. Therefore, the reasons given by Starbucks for sticking to the strategy of direct operation are as follows: behind the brand is the operation of people. Starbucks strictly requires its operators to identify with the company's

philosophy and brand, and emphasizes the consistency of action, discipline and quality.

Promotion

Starbucks' business philosophy is that in the service industry, the most important marketing channel is the word of mouth of the enterprise itself, not advertising. If the store's products and services are not good enough, no amount of advertising will attract customers, but will only make them see a negative image and generate disgust. Instead of spending a lot of money on advertising and promotion, Starbucks insists that every employee has the most professional knowledge and enthusiasm for customer service. Therefore, Starbucks attaches great importance to employee training and will spend a lot of time, energy and money on employee training.

Physical Evidence

Starbucks has made great efforts to build the store into a "third living space" from the design and layout of the store. There are a lot of unique elements in the store, such as the choice of furniture is also Starbucks style.

people

Starbucks pays great attention to employee training, and there is a common problem in many service industries: no matter how strongly

employees want to show up at work, they will eventually give up due to lack of self-discipline. They are late for work, quarrel with rude customers, lose concentration, like to watch the crowd at work, and even quit for no reason. Starbucks pays great attention to employee training, and there is a common problem in many service industries: no matter how strongly employees want to show up at work, they will eventually give up due to lack of self-discipline. They are late for work, quarrel with rude customers, lose concentration, like to watch the crowd at work, and even quit for no reason. The training of Starbucks employees is meticulous, starting from the first customer. Develop self-discipline, patience and willpower.

Process

Service e has always been a hallmark of Starbucks, and with the latest Starbucks service, it's one of the best. Starbucks China has launched a new service called "Pick it up off the street". Starbucks will go from the store to the customer, extending the "third space" culture to a new place of consumption "on the way." At the same time, some industry insiders also said that it shows that Starbucks is well aware of how the coffee market in China is changing. China's "996" work system has made white-collar workers have a strong interest in coffee, and its takeout business is also gradually rising. It's been announced that Starbucks will open 1,000 new stores nationwide next year with "pick up off the street" service. At the same time, Starbucks will also use

this opportunity to find itself a cheaper development space, with several other major coffee brands to start a fierce battle(First financial magazine, 2023).

(4) Porter's Five Forces analysis

Threat of New Entrants

For Starbucks, its main business area is coffee. Moreover, the coffee of Starbucks does not have any technical content, and it does not need high capital investment to enter the industry, and it is not difficult to quit. Therefore, small barriers to entry in the industry pose a certain threat to Starbucks.

Starbucks's main business area is coffee, and the coffee industry is almost no technology content, entry into the industry does not require too high capital investment, so it is not difficult to exit. Therefore, the low threshold of the industry poses a certain threat to Starbucks. But the image that Starbucks has cultivated externally is one of nobility and laidback, and it is a strength that will be hard for any entrant to surpass. When people think of Starbucks, they first think of having a drink at the Starbucks table on a busy weekday afternoon to relieve their tension, or chatting with friends in Starbucks. New entrants need to create a coffee culture like Starbucks, an environment where they can enjoy coffee, and a service that suits their identity, which is not an easy task. Therefore, potential entrants to Starbuck's main business area is coffee, and

the coffee industry is almost no technology content, entry into this industry does not require too high capital investment, so it is not difficult to exit. Therefore, the low threshold of the industry poses a certain threat to Starbucks. But the image that Starbucks has cultivated externally is one of nobility and laidback, and it is a strength that will be hard for any entrant to surpass.

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Threat of Substitute

The marketing strategy of Starbucks' alternatives is mostly to lower prices and provide more warm service, which will attract customers with preferential prices and similar or better quality. But for Starbucks, its main product is coffee, and the alternative to coffee is green drinks such as fruit juices. For Starbucks customers, it is not so much to enjoy the coffee of Starbucks, but to enjoy the culture and atmosphere created by Starbucks, so that consumers can feel the comfort of that environment while enjoying coffee. As a result, there is nothing that the alternatives can do to threaten Starbucks, so much as to compete with Starbucks for culture and atmosphere.

Supplier Power

Suppliers threaten incumbents in the industry by raising product prices and lowering product quality.

The main suppliers of Starbucks are arabica bean suppliers, which are scattered in the three major producing regions of the world. Because Starbucks is a large company, suppliers with high-quality coffee beans are more willing to cooperate with Starbucks, which means stable cooperation and low prices for Starbucks, which is a win-win situation.

Starbucks is also very strict in supplier management, with very detailed and complete management methods. This would mean there is very little bargaining power for the suppliers against Starbucks, and at the same time, Starbucks is a large international firm, which lets it have more bargaining power over suppliers(MBA Skool Team, 2022).

Buyer Power

Starbucks' customers are those with certain social status, high income and certain life style. Many Starbucks stores are also opened under high-end office buildings, and many customers are financial white-collar workers who enjoy the scene of having coffee while working in front of the large Windows in the afternoon. Buyers affect the profits of existing firms in the industry by lowering product prices and raising requirements on product quality.

Starbucks sells a bourgeois taste and feel. Therefore, such customers have less impact on the price, and they pay more attention to the environment and feelings when eating around them, and pay more attention to quality and service. As a result, the bargaining power of customers is low. Starbucks has created a "third living space" in addition to home and work for these people.

Conclusion of analysis

Through the above 7p's analysis, the competitive threat degree of the five forces to Starbucks intuitively expressed as following table(Figure 2):

Figure 2 PESTEL analysis of Starbucks China market

Source of competition	Potential entrants	substitute	supplier	purchaser	Industry competitor
Intensity of competition / Environmental analysis	Barriers to entry are small and differences in services are large	Low cost performance, high customer transfer cost	Small product differences, low industrial concentration, supply buyers with main raw materials	Low price sensitivity, high attention to service and quality	There are many competitors, unequal in size and strength
HIGH			√		√
MIDDLE				√	
LOW	√	√			

Analysis and summary

High prices are Starbucks' business strategy. Starbucks believes that what it provides to customers is not only coffee, but also space and enjoyment, which is more reflected in the added value of service, so its price is higher than that of other brands. In some special times, such as the financial crisis, in some special stores, such as stores with low profits or low ecological areas, more flexibility should be maintained in price and differentiated development should be pursued. Or launch a new brand to compete with itself from the perspective of other services, which can not only squeeze out competitors, but also have differentiated development with itself.

4. Conclusion

The success of Starbucks' marketing strategy in China is not only reflected in the number of stores, but also reflected in market share and financial reporting data.

Through the construction of training schools, foundations, public welfare activities and other social means, Starbucks promotes coffee culture, integrates tea culture, and makes tea products. When developing the Chinese market, Starbucks attaches great importance to taking advantage of geographical areas and other advantages, hiring Chinese people familiar with cultural background to manage and operate the market, training and cultivating

employees with professional skills, increasing the planting volume and producing high-quality and cost-effective coffee beans, so as to achieve the purpose of control. Finally, integrate into the general environment of the Internet era, cooperate with Internet enterprises, and promote products and corporate culture in the form of network.

With the development trend of younger consumers, consumers pay more attention to cost performance. With the growing consumption and demand of coffee, innovation trends are emerging in the coffee industry. Some cost-effective chain coffee brands and specialty coffee brands are gradually grabbing market share, such as Luckin Coffee and MANNER Coffee. Meanwhile, Tims coffee has also been strong in China and listed on Nasdaq in September this year. All these are more or less affected by Starbucks.

5. Recommendations

Starbucks is diving into smaller Chinese cities at a pace never seen before(Shi Jing, 2023).

It is in line with the normal trend for leading brands to sink into the lower-tier market. The Chinese market, especially the sinking market in China, may be the "life-saving straw" to reverse the continuous decline of Starbucks' revenue. However, this strategy can only solve the current difficulties, for the future group, it is bound to enhance customer care to solve the long-term problems.

Customer care is more like the refined stratification of humanized customers: for different levels of customer groups, their own needs are different, so compared with one-to-one customer care marketing, more targeted customer care can directly hit people's hearts. For example, customer life cycle stratification, RFM model stratification, custom customer clustering, and so on. Take the customer life cycle as an example, the new stage to give gifts; Old customer stage exclusive return coupon; Loyal customers are sent periodic purchase reminders.

Of course, customer care for specific user groups needs to vary according to the business characteristics of the enterprise.

It is suggested that Starbucks should adopt a hierarchical approach to customer care for new and old customers. For old customers, it should pay more attention to customer experience, understand their tastes, and recommend similar new products or desserts. New customers can use coupons or similar campaigns to attract people who love coffee but are not Starbucks customers. And interact more with customers, both offline and online. Now many food and beverage companies are setting up Wechat groups, creating a lot of electronic online interaction. It also shows customer care.

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