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Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. An Introduction to Nike.....	3
2.1 Background of Nike	3
2.2 An Overview of Nike's CRM Strategy	3
2.3 Major Challenges in CRM	4
3. A Comprehensive Analysis and Evaluation of Nike's Strategy	6
3.1 PETEL Analysis	6
3.2 SWOT Analysis.....	14
3.3 Ansoff Matrix Analysis	15
4.Conclusion.....	17
5.Recommendation.....	18
References	20

1. Executive Summary

The report aims to provide a detailed analysis of Nike's customer care in China with a major focus on customer relationship management. To this end, the report adopts three models to analyze the company including PESTEL — evaluating the macro or external environment of the company from six aspects, SWOT — analyzing the micro or internal environment of the company from four aspects, and Ansoff Matrix — assessing the future growth of Nike in China so as to provide better advices. Based on the three comprehensive evaluations, a conclusion is drawn. And finally, three recommendations are listed, taking into different factors that can enhance the performance of Nike in customer relationship management.

2. An Introduction to Nike

2.1 Background of Nike

Headquartered in Portland (USA), Nike, Inc, was founded in 1964 by Bill Bowerman with the origin name of Blue Ribbon Sports. The company is a multinational association composed of the Nike, Jordan and Converse brands with a shared purpose to leave long-term impact in design and innovation for sports, athletes and the whole world (Nike, 2022). And it offers a smorgasbord of products including apparel, footwear, sports accessories and equipment and other services. Nike has always set store by the brand effect and brand value, thus choosing a curved check mark, called “swoosh”, as its symbol with the according slogan “JUST DO IT”, and now has created a global image with strong competitiveness.

2.2 An Overview of Nike's CRM Strategy

CRM, as a part of customer care, refers to customer relationship management, and is defined

by Harker (1999) as the integrated effort to identify and maintain a customer network, with the aim of continually reinforcing it for the benefit of both parties, through individualized contacts and interactions that generate value over time. And Stokes (2021) regards CRM as a comprehensive strategy and process of acquiring, retaining and partnering with selective customers to obtain their loyalty as a life-time value. CRM usually involves communication both online and offline, pricing strategy, after-sales service, customer experience and so forth. In this increasingly digitalized world, it is more imperative and harder to establish resilient relationship with customers via traditional ways such as face to face communication. Nonetheless, Nike, as a top sports brand globally, has already taken into account this, thus creating Nike Plus and Nike Fuel service for its users so as to collect their information and tailor personalized services for them. And that's also the reason why the company has obtained an enormous number of fans and followers. For example, Nike Fuel enables its users to record their fitness information so as to monitor their health conditions. And Nike Plus is designed to collect and store users' purchasing records so as to offer personalized services for them and provides them the latest trend of sportswear according to the customer profiles generated by those data, enhancing customer loyalty. In addition, the brand can also store the data of customers' preferences and style. Therefore, more profitability will be generated.

2.3 Major Challenges in CRM

According to Ma (2022), as shown in Figure 1, Nike was still the leading sportswear retailer in China last year with a 25.2% market share, whereas Anta (16.2%) had overtaken Adidas (14.8%) and moved into the second place and Li Ning was closing the gap with the German giant in fourth place with an 8.2% share.

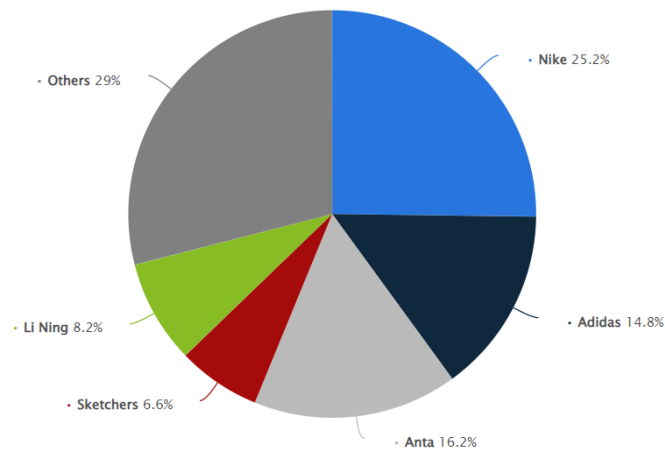


Figure 1 market share of sportswear brands in China in 2021

In fact, it is fair to say that Nike has produced an impressive performance in CRM, but it also faces some challenges. As a top brand focusing on the internet early than others, Nike has signed contracts with many sports celebrities including Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and Lionel Messi to advertise its products via social media, attracting new customers and enhancing its impact globally. However, the success comes at a price. According to Scott (2011), the company had no intention to build communities on Twitter or Facebook (Meta) due to the privacy concerns and compliance issues. As for the Nike Plus service, the collected data can be uploaded to the Nike+ community site, allowing users to keep track of their fitness. But the instability of the website damaged the customer experience and the brand image, which may transfer its loyal customers into enemies (Scott, 2011). And the other challenge is that Nike has infringed the redline of the Chinese people, that is the sovereignty and territorial integrity, as it blamed the government for slaving people in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to grow cotton. As a result, it receives massive boycott from Chinese consumers, leading to a drop in sales. And its Chinese competitors, ANTA Sports, Li-Ning, PEAK and 361 Degrees, are all intensifying their efforts to outperform Nike and Adidas at least in the Chinese market. In fact, based on the Figure 1, ANTA has already surpassed Adidas to become the second sports seller in China and is

closing the gap with Nike gradually. And in some sectors such as basketball shoes, an increasing number of consumers are complaining about the high prices of products, lack of innovation and uncomfortable experience of the shoes. All of these factors should be considered by the company to avoid deteriorating relationship with customers and to provide more personalized customer care services.

3. A Comprehensive Analysis and Evaluation of Nike's Strategy

In this sector, three tools, namely PESTEL, SWOT and Ansoff Matrix, will be adopted to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of Nike's strategies in various aspects, both internally and externally, including strategies for marketing expansion and customer relationship management. The PESTEL tool is utilized for the analysis of macro-environment; the SWOT tool is for analyzing the micro-environment; and the Ansoff Matrix is for the growth of future development.

3.1 PETEL Analysis

PEST(EL) is one of the several tools to investigate the broad macro-environment of an organization which considers the impact from six aspects, namely, Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural, Technological, Ecological and Legal factors (Johnson et al., 2014). In fact, all the six aspects are interconnected, and then each of them will be discussed respectively.

Political factors usually include social systems, a country's governors, policies, guidelines and decrees of the government. Politically, Nike had performed quite well in China without interfering any internal affairs or expressing any negative opinion to blame the country before 2021. But in March 2021, H&M, one of the members of Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), issued a statement on its website to suspend licensing cotton grown in Xinjiang (Ray, 2021). Without

surprise, this brand was criticized harshly by not only the local government, but also Chinese online users in all platforms and every Chinese media outlet. And it also has stirred the fury of Chinese consumers, receiving not only the outrage but also a massive boycott. Not surprisingly, according to BBC (2021), with China being one of its largest suppliers and accounting for nearly 5% of its global sales, this fashion giant witnessed a dramatic decrease of 23% for the second quarter in 2021 compared to that of the last year. That's mainly because the brand was reduced from all major e-commerce platforms, including Taobao, JD.com and Pinduoduo, Dianping, a shop-listing app of Meituan, and even map apps of Tencent and Baidu after the publishment of its statement (Liao, 2021). Also, as a member of BCI, Nike published a similar statement to support the decision of the program to blame the local government for its "slavery" in Xinjiang (Ray, 2021b). In effect, the boycott campaign initiated by Chinese consumers target not only H&M, but all members of BCI including Nike, Converse, Adidas and Burberry as they all published relevant statements, just not as radical as the one issued by H&M. As a result, its sales slumped with the statistics, (Gentrup, 2021), of Alibaba's Tmall, one of largest business-to-business e-commerce platform, showing that Nike witnessed a significant decline of 52% year-on-year in last April. However, against such circumstances, the attitude of Nike was interesting, as it has remained tough to its Chinese consumers, dealing a heavy blow to its customer relationship management. Thus, it saw more severe backlash with its sales slumping by around 59% (Huang & Yao, 2021). In addition to this backlash, Nike has also been hit hard by the Trade disputes between China and the United States, two world's largest economies, in 2018 as US has started to impose tariffs on loads of Chinese products exported to US worth of approximately \$60 billion in a large scale and limited Chinese companies to invest and acquire US companies. Of all kinds of products, sportswear is one of them. And the white house even improved its tariff rate from 10% to 25%, resulting in a catastrophic customer experience. According to Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America, a trade organization, a pair of

popular performance running shoes with the current retail price of \$150 could jump to \$206.25; a popular type of canvas “skate” sneaker with the price of \$49.99 could increase to \$65.57; and the price of a typical hunting boot would balloon from \$190 to \$248.56(Thomas, 2019). Due to the rocketing price, Nike together with Adidas and other shoe retailers cosigned a petition to then US president Donald Trump to stop the trade war, demonstrating that the increase of tariff rate poses a devastating impact on its sales. And the customer experiences of both Chinese consumers and other consumers have been impacted as the ballooning price is unacceptable for them. The first example actually illustrates that Nike with the pursuit of its so called “political correctness” showed indifferent attitude to its Chinese customers regardless of their demand, thus damaging the customer relationship. When it comes to the China-US trade war, the association also failed to provide a sound customer care service without ensuring their customer experience.

Economically, China is one of the countries whose economy recovers fast from the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison with its pre-pandemic level. According to the report (Li, 2022), in 2021, China’s economy continued to recover with its domestic product (GDP) reaching 114 trillion yuan, an increase of 8.1%, and per capital disposable income rising 8.1% in real times. A total of 12.69 million urban job opportunities were created, and the average surveyed unemployment rate amounted to 5.1%. And the consumer price index (CPI) grew by 0.9%. In spite of the fact that the economy was recovering from major shocks including the pandemic, various challenges occurred both in and outside China, and the difficulty to keep the economy stable and buoyant is mounting. Therefore, China’s economy still faces daunting downward pressure. Premier Li Keqiang stressed that to tackle this problem, the major goals for China’s economy is as follows: 1) the GDP growth amounts to 5.5%; 2) about 11 million new urban jobs should be created; 3) CPI increases around 3%; 4) personal income should rise stably; 4) steady growth in both the quality and volume of imports and exports with the further improved

business environment. According to the Figure 2 (Smith, 2022), it can be analyzed that even at the beginning of the outbreak of the coronavirus, the sales of Nike in China also grow slightly. Thanks to the zero-covid policy in 2020, China's economy bounced back to the pre-pandemic level and even surpassed that slightly in accordance with the Figure 3 (Huld, 2022). Therefore, combined the Figure 2 and the Figure 3, it is evident that Nike's sales also ballooned as the country's economy is rocketing. However, because of the recurrent COVID-19, many major cities in China have suffered from it in the first half of this year. And also due to the strict covid-curb restrictions, the country's economy once again has stalled with central business districts (CBD), restaurants and shopping malls closed. From the Figure 3 it can be seen that the economy almost halved compared to the level in 2021, and thus the overall sales (including sales of footwear, apparel and equipment) of Nike in China slumped in contrast with the level in 2021 as shown in Figure 2.

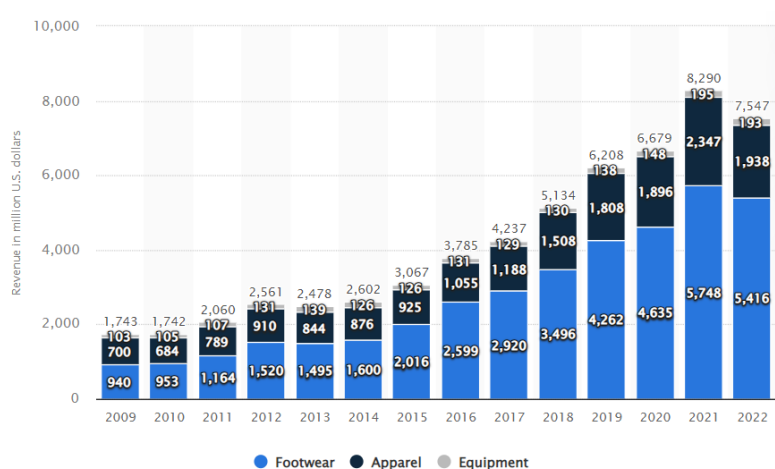


Figure 2 fluctuation of Nike sales

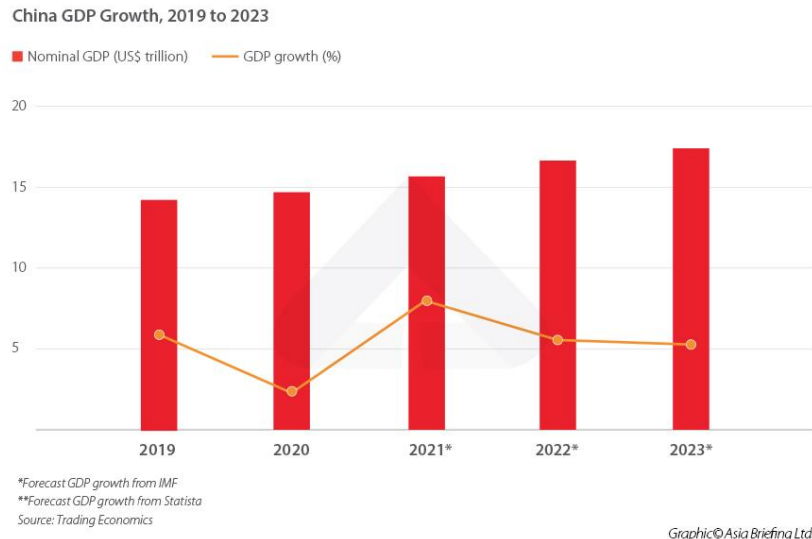


Figure 3 China GDP Growth

As a result, for consumers who prefer purchasing stuff in the brick-and-mortar stores, their expectation for shopping has dropped to the lowest point; and for consumers who prefer online shopping on e-commerce platforms where the styles of apparel are more diverse, their shopping experience also has bottomed out owing to the rigorous strictions that lead to the suspension of express delivery. In this case, even if customers want to go shopping online, couriers cannot deliver parcels to them, resulting in a bad purchasing experience. And the company has no alternatives as it has to obey the rules and policies of the country, otherwise it will be fined. And some customer can understand this and they will not blame the association, whereas for those customers who don't understand this, they will blame the bad purchasing experience for the company. And such misunderstanding will get the company into troubles with the impaired customer relationship and poor buying experience.

Under the framework of PESTEL, “S” not only refers to social factors but also cultural factors as cultural difference servers as a key indicator whether a company could succeed in a foreign country. And the culture and tradition will also have long-term influence on the local residents. Take China as an example. As a country steeped in 5,000-year history and tradition, Chinese

consumers have shown their special preference to products including clothes and shoes that incorporate cultural elements. In fact, Nike has long pursued its spirit of “Local for Local” or “Go Local”, as said by Filice et al. (2018), and designed a lot of products for local residents. In an effort to woo Chinese consumers, both Nike and Adidas promoted apparel and shoes integrating Chinese elements with bold designs (Wall Street Journal, 2008). But this doesn’t mean that Nike performs well in Chinese market with Chinese-style products. In 2016, Nike releases a new version of Air Force 1 shoes, a Chinese New Year iteration, with two Chinese characters on each of them to celebrate the Spring Festival in the country. These two characters are 發 ('fa') and 福 ('fu') and are embedded in the heel of the left and right shoe respectively. And they are always associated with the meaning of “being rich or prosperous” and “gaining fortune and luck” separately. However, if the two characteristics are viewed together, they form a phrase, meaning “get fat” in Chinese. As a result, the official account of Nike on Weibo, Chinese-version Twitter, received thousands of comments just a few minutes after the introduction of this pair of shoes, some of which are quite mild like “Excuse me? Getting fat?” and some of which are quite acerbic like “What kind of misunderstanding do you have about Chinese culture? Surely you have one Chinese person in your company! Otherwise, you can simply look for one on the streets!” (Chan, 2016). Actually, this can be called an accident which ignited the fury of Chinese consumers who always are proud of and set store by their culture and tradition. And after this accident, the company hadn’t issued any response to its local customers on any social media outlets, and remained the advertisement with the shoes pinned at the top of its Weibo account. Such a supercilious attitude at least would spoil its relationship with Chinese customers, leaving a terrible impression to them, and demonstrates that there is

no customer care in Nike's mind when it comes to Chinese consumers. Such an example also indicates that the company doesn't pay much attention to the Chinese culture valued by local people, and have not conducted any in-depth research on Chinese culture and tradition despite its special-version clothes and shoes designed for the Chinese New Year.

Technologically, Nike has played a leading role in the industry with its advanced technology for shoes including Air Max, Zoom Air, Flyknit, React and so forth. For example, Air Max can ensure that while you are running, you're automatically creating stress on your joints by reshaping itself and bouncing back when being impacted (Footasylum, 2020). Zoom Air is actually evolved from Air Max by adding the tightly stretched fibers into the pressurized air units so as to enhance impact absorption and responsive energy return; Flyknit is designed for footwear weight reduction by weaving strong but lightweight strands to form a sock-like one-piece upper that secures a foot perfectly in place and it can avoid overlays as the knit can be woven at different points to tighten the shoes and offer customers better experience; and React is created for running sneakers to reduce weight, offer better cushion and boost energy return (Studio, 2022). However, with the rapid development of many Chinese sports brand including Li-Ning, ANTA, and 361 degree and the strong competition from Adidas, Nike's technological advances are not as prominent as before. For instance, Li-Ning has developed the cutting-edge Boom technology for basketball shoes that even outperform the Zoom Air of Nike; Adidas also developed Boost technology that is adopted not only on basketball shoes but also on running shoes that can compete with Nike; and ANTA also created its Nitrogen technology for running shoes for Chinese national teams and for signature shoes of Klay Thompson, an NBA basketball starer. Despite such fierce competition, Nike still has slight edges. But the real problem is that

it no longer creates new technologies and just adopts the old technologies in different form on its new shoes, arousing complaints among its consumers not just in China but globally. Therefore, the more complaints customers make, the worse the experience they have. Thus, a vicious circle is formulated, and the customer relationship will be deteriorating.

Ecologically, Nike has always claimed itself as an environmental-friendly company. The 2021 NIKE Impact Report listed its overall performance over the past few years and of its 2025 Purpose targets, including Science-Based Carbon Target (2030) and Net Zero Target (2050) (Nike, 2022). According to its report, Nike's total greenhouse gas reduction through the use of environmental-friendly materials reached 123,367 tons, a 28% increase over the previous fiscal year; recycled polyester fibers accounted for 38% of Nike's total polyester fiber usage in footwear, double than that of the previous fiscal year; the use of renewable electricity in its own and self-owned facilities amounted to 78%, ballooning 30% than the previous year and already exceeding the company's previously set goal of 70 percent of 2025 Purpose targets. With all its ecological accomplishments, Nike released a new series of shoes, called Cosmic Unity. Nike (2021) said that it is the next step in the vision of a zero-waste future and designed with at least 25% recycled material transformed from trash. However, the company is too radical to realize that the performance of the new shoes is so poor. The responses from Chinese consumers are not ideal with some people thinking it is too soft without resilience and the friction is too low. There is no doubt that environmental conservation is important for a company, however, as a global company, its top priority should always be the customer care. Since the new shoes cannot be recalled, there is no way for the company to repair its customer relationship but try to enhance the quality and performance of its new products.

3.2 SWOT Analysis

First explained by Albert Humphrey in the 1960s, SWOT analysis is a structured planning method to assess and foresee a company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from the perspective of micro-environment (Alka, 2015). As this report mainly focuses on the challenges faced by Nike in terms of customer care and customer relationship management, only the threats and weaknesses of Nike will be discussed in detail.

One of the biggest strengths of Nike is its strong brand image which not only will attract new customers and retain old customers, but also is conducive to promoting the development of sports. And it has assumed its responsibility on Corporate Social Responsibility as one of the most influential brands globally in pursuing sustainable development, creating innovative design and inspiring the future generation so as to make a better world.

The major internal weakness of Nike is technological drawback. In the introduction part, the Nike +, where its members can upload their running distance and share it with other members, has been introduced. It produced fruitful achievements as it is quite popular among consumers, but it also has a problem — instability. And many Nike+ members received an apology e-mail from the company for some users failed to log in, synchronize services and edit their profiles (Scott, 2011). Another example is that in 2010, Nike introduced Nike Run Club app which can be used for keeping track of exercise records including jogging routes, but somehow, the app was halted and removed to a mini app on Wechat owned by Tencent, a Chinese tech behemoth (Liang & Kubota, 2022). A major part of the reason is that its functions are similar to those of the KEEP, an exercising app owned by Tencent, as both of them can record your exercising data and can provide guiding videos and tips for users. However, KEEP has one advantage that Nike

Run Club doesn't, that is its interconnectivity with Wechat, a requisite chatting app for almost all Chinese residents, which will be more convenient for them. As a result, the customer experience will drop and such problems cannot be easily addressed as it is relevant to data privacy.

One of the opportunities for Nike is that it can explore and expand its market in emerging countries in ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) where there are no additional tariffs but subsidies and preferential policies. And Nike suspended its cooperation with wholesale retailers such as Dillard's, Zappos and Fred Meyer, aiming to reposition its products and provide better customer experience (Abel, 2020).

The major external threat of the company is increasing competition from Chinese brands such as Li-Ning and ANTA as well as Adidas, the German sports giant. According to Lau (2021), Anta and Li-Ning are two leading brands in China ranking at the third and fourth place respectively in terms of market share, only trailed by Adidas, the second place, and Nike, the first place. And Li-Ning has rapidly expanded its offline stores with the number rocketing from 1,985 in 2003 to 7,915 in 2009, ranking the first place among Chinese sports brand; and ANTA outnumbered Nike (China)'s 23.681 billion yuan in revenue in the first half of this year with a revenue of 25.965 billion yuan after surpassing Adidas (China) in 2020 (China News Weekly, 2022). Therefore, Nike has to improve its customer care and service including CRM so as to strengthen its competitiveness and beat other Chinese brands.

3.3 Ansoff Matrix Analysis

First described by Igor Ansoff, the Ansoff Matrix is a two-by-two depiction of options available to organizations if they aim to improve their profitability and strengthen their strategic

management (Meldrum & McDonald, 1995). The Ansoff Matrix involves four parts: product development, market penetration, market development, and diversification.

Market penetration: Based on the analysis above, it is easy to find that Nike still dominates Chinese market with its highest market share for many years. As shown in Figure 4(Bain, 2021), its market share in China remains on the rise. However, the gap between Nike and other brands including Adidas, ANTA and Li-Ning are bridging. To intensify its market penetration, the company should directly reach to its customers so as to enhance its customer care and offer them better services.

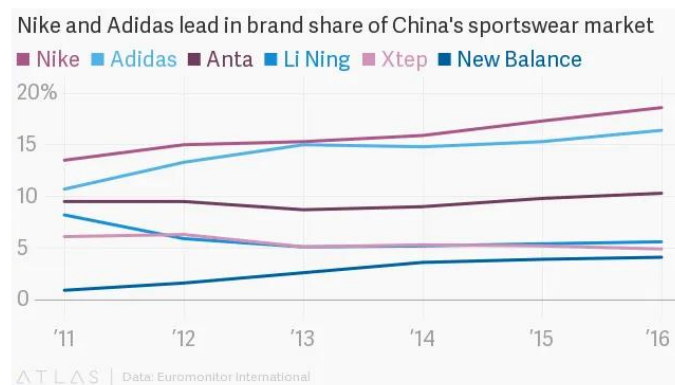


Figure 4 sportswear market share in China

Product development: In fact, Nike not only needs to release new and innovative products in the Chinese market, but also the global market, especially in terms of basketball shoes. By innovation, it not only needs to make new and attracting designs, but also some new functions which can really improve the performance of normal people not just athletes on the court so as to attract more new buyers and strengthen customer loyalty.

Market development: Nike needs to expand new market channels in China so as to compete those home-grown brands as they are more and more popular in the country due to the above reasons mentioned. As the prices for most Nike products are relatively high, only a minority of

residents in second-tier and third-tier cities can afford these products.

Diversification: Nike produces and sells a lot of products in different sectors, including basketball, football, running, golf and so on. However, diversification is usually adopted for a company to enter a new market or a new sector. But Nike, as a mature global brand, has no need in China to exploit new markets as the challenges and risks are too high to control. To change its status quo, the company should step up its efforts in enhancing its customer relationship management by better talking with customers so as to enhance their experience. By doing so, the customer loyalty will be intensified.

4. Conclusion

A total of three analysis models — PESTEL, SWOT, and Ansoff Matrix — are adopted in the report to evaluate Nike's overall performance in customer care in China. With the PESTEL analysis, five factors except legal factors are all discussed in detail. Politically, Nike has encountered two challenges. The first is its attitude on an extremely sensitive issue related to human rights, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Its tough attitude aroused the anger among the local residents and stirred a massive boycott campaign. And the second is the rising prices caused by the China-US trade war, which lead to the rising prices. And therefore, the customer relationship will be deteriorating and the purchasing experience will be poor. Economically, the recurrent covid-19 has dealt a heavy blow to China's economy despite its recovery in 2021. And the restrict zero-covid policy also forces lots of offline stores to close, couriers also are unable to deliver parcels to customers. Thus, the customer experience is not as ideal as expected. Social-culturally, Nike doesn't pay much heed to Chinese culture as one of its new shoes have mistakenly formed a phrase of "getting fat" to celebrate Chinese New Year, stirring consumers' fury. Technologically, its advanced air-cushion technology including Air Max and Zoom air are

no longer cutting-edge, as Li-Ning and ANTA has developed their own technologies of Boom and Nitrogen respectively, and Adidas also developed Boost technology. And ecologically, Nike always claims itself an environmental-friendly company. But the Cosmic Unity, a series of shoes made by recyclable, received loads of complaints about its poor performance. And with the SWOT analysis, the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of Nike are assessed. Its strength is its strong brand image that can not only boost the development of sports, but also inspire the future to actively participate in sports. Its internal weakness is the technological shortcoming as its mobile app on mobile phone was suspended and removed to a mini program on Wechat. Its opportunity is that Nike has suspended its cooperation with some wholesale retailers so as to provide better customer service. And its threat is the increasingly fierce rivalry from Li-Ning, ANTA and Adidas who have opened many new offline stores with growing market share. And the Ansoff Matrix analysis points out that the company should redouble its efforts to innovate products with new designs, exploit new markets in second-tier and third-tier cities by reducing its prices to promote market development, and increase its market penetration by improving its customer relationship management.

5.Recommendation

Based on the conclusion, three recommendations will be listed as follow. First of all, if Nike wants to remain its position as the dominator in Chinese market, the world largest emerging market, it has to be clear that it should stay away from political issues, especially sensitive ones, and support the decision of the local government so as to demonstrate that they on the side of local residents. In this case, boycotts will disappear and there will be no more arguments between the company and customers. And the customer relationship will also not be damaged. Second, Nike should hire more creative designers who also understand Chinese culture or at

least have the patience to conduct in-depth research on it. By doing so, accidents mentioned above will not happen again, and local customers will understand that the company has spent efforts, thus happy to embrace the new products. And without the complaints from customers, CRM will not be spoiled. But it should be noticed that customer care shouldn't be ignored. Rather, it needs to establish a new channel to directly reach to their customers and provide personalized services. And third, Nike can cooperate with Tencent to develop a new app that not only enjoys the functions of the removed app, but also can connect to Wechat so as to offer better and comprehensive customer relationship management including pre- and after-sales services, data synchronization and so on. By following the three suggestions, Nike may witness a better performance in customer care and customer relationship management.

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