

A Discussion on the Marketing Strategy of Chinese Local Brand of Manly Personal Care Industry: The Case of Make Sense

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Abstract. Current research focused on the factors that motivate Chinese men to purchase grooming products and the marketing strategies of cosmetics and skincare brands in China. This study attempts to fill the research gap about the marketing strategy of Chinese local brands belonging to the manly personal care industry. This paper selects Make Sense, the market leader of the mentioned category above, as the research object. Utilizing the 4P theory to analyze the marketing strategy of Make Sense, this paper reveals that Make Sense has obvious drawbacks in product and place strategy. Lacking products with distinguished advantages, lacking customized products with solutions to problems belonging to diverse skin types, and lacking offline flagship stores are three major problems. This paper suggests that Make Sense can optimize its marketing strategy in the following three paths. Collaboration with more specialized doctors, construction of offline flagship stores, and a greater refinement of product categories are all significant.

Keywords: Man, personal care, marketing strategy, local brand, China.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the market of manly personal care has been a new vantage point for investors. The products of this market are made up of skincare products, cosmetics, shower products, hair styling products and perfume for men. Its market size has steadily grown since 2020. When it comes to 2021, the total income from sales reached 14 billion Chinese Yuan [1]. As a market aims at men, the expansion of its size suggests that more and more men pay attention to their own appearance. The past research about marketing not only focused on the factors that drive Chinese men to purchase but also the marketing strategies of cosmetics and skincare brands in China.

For the former issue, researchers found that social recognition, social expectation, word-of-mouth, the concern about own appearance and health can motivate Chinese men to purchase facial care products [2]. Moreover, advertising and lifestyle are also strongly linked with their decision-making [3].

For the latter issue, some scholars analyzed the marketing strategy of a non-Chinese brand conducting in new media [4]. This offered a reference for those brands which are dedicated to promoting themselves in China. Other scholars pointed out that brands should attach great importance to interaction on live broadcasting platforms. As a result, they are more likely to make customers empathetic with them and decide to order products [5].

In past research, the marketing of personal care brands owned by Chinese are lack of concern. They produce diverse product kits for various needs in personal care. Additionally, these brands cater to Chinese men with a fast-paced lifestyle.

This paper will apply the 4P theory to analyze the marketing strategy of a typical Chinese personal care brand for men, Make Sense. The research methodology is bibliography analysis, which means this paper will analyze the former bibliography and marketing cases of Make Sense. It is one of the most profitable brands in the relevant category. After summarizing the current situation of this brand, this paper will offer some suggestions for similar brands in China.

2. Brief Introduction of Make Sense

2.1. The Market Leader in Chinese Local Brands of Relevant Category

Make Sense, a Chinese local brand set up in 2019, is currently one of the brands belonging to the manly personal care industry. It insists on a core value that manly personal care is requisite and appropriate. According to Beauty Data, the world's leading beauty industry platform of big data, Make Sense was the top seller in Chinese local brands of the manly personal care industry in 2022 [1]. It offers products ranging from skincare, hair grooming, body care, fragrance, and cosmetics. The brand made itself outstanding mostly based on its hairspray, hair clay, and facial cleanser, which averagely sells more than 7000 pieces monthly.

2.2. A Developing Brand when Compared to Non-Chinese Brands

Make Sense still has a long way to go when compared to non-Chinese brands such as L'Oréal and Biotherm. According to Beauty Data, the total sales of Make Sense were less than a quarter of L'Oréal's and merely over half of Biotherm's in 2022 [1]. Moreover, the reputation of L'Oréal and Biotherm is much better than Make Sense. The main reason is that many non-Chinese brands own more collaborating dermatologists and experts worldwide while most Chinese brands only own a relatively tiny group of native experts. For instance, L'Oréal is in collaboration with more than 4000 professionals while the number of Make Sense is only 50. Consequently, non-Chinese brands are more reliable to consumers in this way.

2.3. The Target Market is Generation Z and Elite Men

Make Sense has leveraged Yonghao Luo and Boran Jing, two typical male celebrities in China, to hype up their promotional campaign. The mentioned influencers mainly attract men aged from 18 to 35 years old, which refers to Generation Z and elder elites who attached importance to personal care.

3. Analysis of Marketing Strategies of Make Sense

3.1. The 4P Theory

James O. McKinsey, a professor in the University of Chicago, proposed the 4P marketing theory in the 1960s. The 4Ps involve Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. Product refers to tangible goods, intangible services and all virtually valuable commodities. Price is based on the position and value of a product. Place is the path from producers to consumers. Promotion consists of promotional staff, advertising, and public relations. 4P theory is widely utilized to analyze marketing strategies by brands [4].

3.2. Lacking in Products Meeting the Expectation of Consumers

One significant drawback derives from product strategy. Like other brands, the advertising of Make Sense highlighted the advantages of its products, however, the word of mouth is not decent. Take the top seller of Make Sense in Taobao, hairspray as an example, there are more than 3300 follow-up comments about it. The follow-up comments are usually more trustworthy because they are reviews based on the experience of customers. However, the first 15 comments are mostly negative. Among these negative comments, "poor styling effects" was mentioned 12 times. Hair styling effect is the core effect of hairspray. Adverse reviews about this effect can be fatal to the reputation of this product. As the best-selling product, the bad reputation of it can also be bad news for the marketing of Make Sense.

When it comes to the non-staple products of Make Sense, the condition is also disappointing. For example, facial mask sells an average of 400 orders per month. The comments about its effect are slightly more affirmative than hairspray. The first 15 follow-up comments contain 5 positive

comments. The counter reviews mostly complained about the poor hydrating effect and the problem of causing pimples.

The reason for negative reviews stems from the disappointing gap between actual effects and what is claimed to be achievable in product promotions. This reveals that the selling point should be modified to lower the expectation of customers before purchases.

Additionally, Make Sense also lack attention to its product life circle. The product life circle involves five stages: introduction, growth, maturity, saturation, and decline. In the growth stage, the sales increase at a faster rate and profits increases as well. The maturity stage featured that most buyers have bought the product [6]. In the manly personal care industry, Make Sense is the top seller among Chinese local brands. Moreover, a majority of target consumers of Make Sense have made their purchases, but a substantial part of the target market is still conquered by non-Chinese brands. As a result, this paper suggests that the product life-circle of Make Sense is in the transitional stage between growth and maturity. Product modification is supposed to be a part of marketing plans in the maturity stage [6]. However, until the day of the completion of this paper, most products of Make Sense lack upgraded versions.

In conclusion, both staple products and non-staple products have poor word-of-mouth because of their poor effects on personal care, which means Make Sense should keep product development in the front.

3.3. Lacking in Products Catering for Diverse Skin Types

The incomplete product category of Make Sense also embodies the disadvantage of its product strategies. The existing skincare products and cosmetics of Make Sense include followed categories: facial cleanser, facial mask, hydrating lotion, moisturizer, lip balm, sunscreen, and tone-up cream. The first four of them have been separated into three series which relatively functioned as hydrating, oil controlling, and acne dispelling. The next two of them are designed with some unique effects which are nonexistent in competitors' products. When customers purchase tone-up cream, they can make decisions according to whether they are fair skin tone or darker skin tone.

According to the follow-up comments below the mentioned categories, many customers introduced their skin types and illustrated the negative effects occurring on their faces after application. Additionally, some customers also mentioned that the products from Make Sense are less effective for them and they are in good condition when using products of internationally renowned brands, which have been divided into several series fit for different skin types. These reviews support that products specifically designed for different skin types should be launched in the future.

The conventional classification for skin types involves dry, oily, combination and, sensitive skin [7]. These descriptions for skin types are still instructive for the personal care industry. Take L'Oréal as a reference, it divides its skin care products into three panels according to three different skin types, which relatively belong to three age stages. For those who have oily skin aged from 20 to 30, L'Oréal designed a series of products functioning as both oil-controlling and acne-dispelling. For those who have combination skin or dry skin aged from 30 to 40, products functioned lightning and hydrating can be purchased by consumers. For those who have wrinkles aged over 40, L'Oréal developed anti-aging products [4].

However, the traditional descriptions of skin types have been seen as flawed and insufficient and thus offering insufficient instruction for consumers to purchase the most suitable products [7]. Consequently, even the market leaders of the industry like L'Oréal should make their products more personalized for customers with diverse skin types. Make Sense is also supposed to place this job on the agenda.

3.4. Lacking in Offline Stores

The place strategies of Make Sense are also imperfect. Make Sense majorly conducts its transactions online. Ostensibly, this strategy caters to the needs of men. Because many of them

attempt to purchase what they need in a single destination, which means most men pursue convenience. Online shopping undoubtedly is the primary path for quick transactions.

However, the brand overlooked the significance of offline stores. They can be momentous for the marketing strategy of place and promotion.

Currently, to cope with the customers who have lower satisfaction with standardized products, companies in the beauty industry, which is a part of the personal care industry, make efforts to cater to diverse needs of customers through one-to-one customer care [8]. Generally, customers are more likely to have a real sense of customization through offline communication.

On one hand, it can improve the brand's reputation and purchase rate. If customers can only order online, they will mainly take online reviews as references. These online reviews about the products, products usage, recommendations, and complaints are normally regarded as genuine and trustworthy [9]. Sometimes former consumers post bad reviews about effects because they use the products in improper ways. In this way, potential customers are less likely to purchase because of incomplete reviews.

When it comes to offline stores, the promotional staff have a chance to teach consumers the proper way to apply products on their hair or faces. Consequently, consumers can be clear about the actual effect of products and are more likely to make a purchase. Moreover, the brand has a chance to encourage consumers to post positively heartfelt comments online in exchange for discounts, which is a pathway to reputation improvement.

On the other hand, it can be beneficial for acquiring customer insights. When customers try out the demo of products in offline stores, promotional staff can immediately get access to the feedback about products. The customer insights obtained from feedback can be more precise because staff are more likely to be empathetic with consumers through their facial expressions and other gestures.

Generally, offline stores can be beneficial supplement for online stores. More palpable experience can be good news for customers' decisions and brands' marketing strategy analysis.

4. Suggestions for Strategy Enhancement

4.1. Collaborate with More Professional Doctors

Potent research and development staff is significant for brands in the personal care industry. Make Sense should also increase their cooperation with dermatologists or biologists. On one hand, they can discover ingredients which are more efficient in specific effects than other elements. In this way, the new arrivals are more likely to own unique advantages which make products distinguished from numerous rivals.

On the other hand, they can make advertising more convincing. Many international brands have leveraged medical professionals to promote their products. With analysis reports illustrating the advantages of products, which are usually conducted by a number of specialists, many brands gain good word-of-mouth.

Currently, Make Sense mainly utilized influencers who are appealing to men aged from 18 to 40 years old to motivate promotion. Those influencers are usually outstanding in the relevant groups, such as college students and laborers. But they are not as persuasive as experts in the medical field. Make Sense also collaborated with 50 specialists to issue a guidebook for men's skincare in 2022.

In the future, Chinese brands like Make Sense should attach more importance to product innovation and post content produced by dermatologists and biologists more frequently on social media. Hopefully, brands can obtain better reputation through the mentioned adjustment.

4.2. Construct Offline Flagship Stores

Various international and Chinese well-known brands have constructed offline flagship stores to offer consumers more tangible experience. Renowned Chinese cosmetic brand Florasis landed its first flagship store in 2022 in Hangzhou, China. The staff of that store pointed out that offline stores can not only offer consumers a deeper comprehension of the brand value but also provide consumers with

more customized service [10]. In this way, Florasis is more likely to transform former customers into loyal customers.

As a brand offering diverse categories of products to consumers, Make Sense has not landed an offline flagship store until now. Considering the development in the long term, an offline flagship store is necessary for retaining consumers and improving its reputation.

4.3. A Greater Refinement of Product Categories

Make Sense is supposed to amplify its product categories in order to optimize sales. As the top seller in the Chinese manly personal care market, L'Oréal has targeted the second-tier and third-tier cities in China and sells advanced personal care products at a price ranging from 50 to 120 yuan. The price strategy of L'Oréal is to make advanced products more cost-effective for consumers. Most Chinese brands have not formed any mature production and development system rival to L'Oréal. In this way, the cost of production and development of most Chinese brands is higher than L'Oréal. Consequently, it is rarely possible for Chinese brands to beat L'Oréal through price strategy.

Fortunately, the products of L'Oréal for men still lack customization. Even though L'Oréal has designed three series of skincare products according to different skin types, the follow-up reviews of consumers consist of numerous complaints. "Poor effects" appeared 7 times out of the first fifteen follow-up comments.

In summary, Chinese brands like Make Sense should first refine the categories based on diverse skin types. Additionally, they should invest more time in improving product quality to achieve a round of good reputation.

5. Conclusion

Current research reveals that Chinese brands of manly personal care still have a long way to go when compared to the top brands owned by non-Chinese parties. Chinese brands should improve the drawbacks in product, place, and promotion strategies. The drawbacks mainly centered on three aspects. First of all, most products do not have outstanding advantages when compared to competitors. Moreover, the design of most products is unable to fulfill various needs of consumers, which is also a fatal shortage aggravating the reputation of brands. Furthermore, the absence of offline flagship stores causes incomplete place strategies. After analyzing the marketing strategies and word-of-mouth of Make Sense and some other renowned brands, this paper suggests that Chinese brands can not only build up offline flagship stores to enhance their place strategies, but also optimize their products through collaboration with specialists and a better refinement of product classification based on diverse skin types. As a result, Chinese brands are more likely to own better reputations than some major international rivals, which is good news for the Chinese market.

This paper can be a reference for Chinese brands specializing in manly personal care products, which is never mentioned before. Brands can be aware of some problems in current marketing strategies and adjust their marketing plan referred to suggestions about marketing strategy enhancement.

The limitation of this research can be concluded in two dimensions, which relatively are data and case. On the one hand, the number of comments put into analysis is not on a large scale. As a result, the insights about reputation are not comprehensive. On the other hand, this paper does not analyze the concrete marketing campaigns of Make Sense. Consequently, the disadvantages in promotion strategy can be replenished in future research.

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