

Research on the Marketing Strategy of Chinese Television Dramas in the Digital Era

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Abstract. The rapid evolution of the Chinese television industry in the digital era has necessitated innovative marketing strategies to captivate diverse audiences. This study delves into the dynamic interplay between online streaming services, social media engagement, influencer collaborations, fan interactions, and crossover collaborations in the context of Chinese television dramas. The research background highlights the industry's transition from conventional broadcasting to online platforms, emphasizing the growing significance of digital marketing strategies. Recognizing the pivotal role of youths as a valuable audience category, this paper addresses the challenges digital marketing faces in attracting and engaging this demographic. The research results reveal that while online streaming services and social media platforms enhance accessibility, content saturation, and content dispersion across platforms pose challenges in maintaining engagement. The integration of influencers and fan engagement has driven viewership and cultivated a sense of belonging; however, authenticity concerns and managing fan expectations remain key issues. Crossover collaborations and product placements exhibit potential for synergies between e-commerce and entertainment industries, though incongruity with storyline and execution challenges needs careful consideration. The research findings hold significant implications for Chinese television industry stakeholders, offering a comprehensive understanding of effective marketing practices, challenges, and solutions, thereby enhancing the business value of Chinese television dramas through informed decision-making, sustainable growth, and a global reach. The findings empower content creators, production houses, marketers, and streaming platforms to tailor strategies that resonate with audiences and enhance viewer engagement, crafting effective marketing strategies in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital Marketing Strategies, Chinese Television Dramas, Audience Engagement.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Due to the rapid advancement of digital technologies and the rise of social platforms in recent years, the global entertainment industry has experienced a significant transformation. This transformation has a giant influence on the production, distribution, and consumption of various forms of media, including television dramas. With diverse narratives and rich cultural heritage, Chinese television dramas have gained substantial popularity within China and among international audiences, making them a worthy subject of study in the evolving digital era.

The digital era has reshaped traditional marketing practices, leading the strategies employed in promoting Chinese television series have undergone substantial changes. In the past, television dramas relied on conventional advertising methods to create awareness and attract viewers, such as billboards, newspapers, posters, and television commercials. However, the digital era has introduced brand-new avenues for marketing, including social media platforms, streaming services, and online communities. Those platforms allow for more targeted and interactive approaches to reach the audience, eventually enabling the entertainment industry to adapt digital marketing strategies for better engagement and visibility.

The growth of online streaming platforms has played a pivotal role in disseminating Chinese drama serials. Particularly, streaming services have not only ensured these dramas are accessible to a wider audience but also presented unique marketing opportunities. The availability of real-time data on engagement and viewership provides insights into audience preferences, allowing marketers to tailor

effective strategies to meet specific demands. Additionally, online platforms offer direct interaction between audience and creators, facilitating the development of fan communities and fostering more immersive viewing experiences.

Furthermore, identifying young individuals as the most valuable and desirable audience demographic has prompted the need for effective digital marketing strategies in the social media era. As Chinese television companies understand the significance of their online audience serving as reputation amplifiers that have the potential to enhance broadcast ratings through positive influence, exploring the nuances and preferences of audiences in the diverse array of digital platforms becomes crucial [1]. The challenge lies in creating marketing campaigns that consistently and effectively resonate with youths across different online spaces.

Social media platforms have become an integral part of promoting television dramas. Platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin (Tiktok) are essential tools for building anticipation, generating buzz, and engaging with fans. Creative content, such as trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, and interactive challenges, can go viral and contribute significantly to the success of a drama series. Leveraging social media influencers and fan communities can amplify the reach of marketing efforts and enhance audience participation. Crossover collaborations between brands and dramas and product placement in television dramas can also impact brand endorsement.

Moreover, the emergence of big data analytics and artificial intelligence in the entertainment industry has opened doors to more sophisticated marketing strategies. Marketers can refine their methods by analyzing user behavior, preferences, and consumption patterns. Predictive analytics can aid in identifying potential hits and tailoring promotional efforts accordingly, thereby reducing risks and maximizing returns.

In light of these developments, a growing need exists to systematically investigate and understand the evolving marketing strategies the Chinese television drama industry employs in the digital era. This research explores the changing landscape of marketing practices, the role of digital platforms, the impact of crossover collaborations, and the integration of data-driven approaches. By examining successful case studies and conducting in-depth analyses, this study intends to offer valuable insights for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers involved in the media and entertainment sector. Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of the marketing strategies in the digital era can contribute to the continued growth and influence of Chinese television dramas.

1.2. Literature Review

Bai unpacks the phenomenon that has led to the creation of fan communities, interactive challenges, and real-time discussions, thereby shaping the way audiences perceive and interact with Chinese television content. The article emphasizes the role of online platforms and social media in amplifying the reach and impact of Chinese television shows. And the author underscores how these platforms have enabled fans to become active participants, playing a pivotal role in shaping television dramas' narratives, characters, and outcomes [1].

In the article, Liu investigates using social media platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and others to engage with consumers, build brand awareness, and drive sales. They examine how companies leverage influencer collaborations, user-generated content, and personalized approaches to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement in the digital era [2].

Yu and Houn underscore in the research that social media platforms can enhance user satisfaction by enabling self-expression, fostering connections, and providing opportunities for skill development. Their study highlights how aligning marketing efforts with these fundamental needs can lead to more effective campaigns and deeper customer engagement. It offers insights into crafting strategies that resonate with users' psychological motivations, yielding positive outcomes for both individuals and businesses [3].

Existing research on Chinese television dramas predominantly focuses on content analysis and audience reception, leaving a gap in understanding contemporary marketing strategies in the digital

age. This study aims to address this gap by comprehensively examining the evolving digital marketing tactics and their impact on the appeal of Chinese television series.

1.3. Research Framework

This article mainly encompasses three key dimensions. Firstly, it investigates the evolving landscape of digital marketing strategies that promote Chinese television dramas, including online streaming services and social media leverage, influencer engagement, and crossover collaboration. Secondly, the study delves into the interactive content dissemination underpinning successful marketing campaigns, emphasizing content alignment with diverse audience preferences in various platforms. Lastly, the framework explores integrating data-driven approaches, encompassing big data analytics and AI, to optimize marketing efforts and adapt strategies in real time. Through these dimensions, this research aims to provide comprehensive insights into effective marketing strategies, facilitating the continued global influence of Chinese television dramas.

2. Method

2.1. Case Study

A case study is a research method that involves in-depth investigation and analysis of a specific instance, event, or phenomenon within its real-life context. In this research, multiple case studies of popular television dramas will be selected to provide a diverse and representative sample. These cases enable an in-depth analysis of the strategies employed, their implementation, and their outcomes. Each case is examined within its unique context, considering factors such as genre, target audience, and distribution platform. Using the case study method, this article aims to delve deep into specific successful marketing strategies Chinese television dramas employ.

2.2. Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis is an analysis method that compares two or more things or objects to discover their similarities and differences. In this article, it will be conducted to identify patterns and trends in marketing strategies across the selected cases. By systematically comparing multiple cases, this approach will facilitate the identification of commonalities, differences, and trends across different instances of marketing campaigns. Moreover, this method allows for the identification of gaps, potential areas for improvement, and innovative approaches that can be tailored to the specific needs of the Chinese television drama industry. Eventually, comparative analysis in this research will enhance the depth and breadth of understanding, providing a broader perspective on the effectiveness of various strategies and drawing broader insights into effective practices within the Chinese television drama industry in the digital era.

3. Results

3.1. Online Streaming Services and Leveraging Social Media Platforms

The expansion of online streaming services has been instrumental in distributing Chinese drama series. Specifically, some dominant platforms, such as iQiyi, Tencent Video, Youku, and Mango TV, have revolutionized Chinese television consumption, providing viewers with on-demand access to a diverse array of content and introducing distinctive chances for marketing due to the audience's curiosity in watching drama series that might not be accessible through conventional television [4]. Simultaneously, social media platforms in China have become vital for audience engagement and content promotion. Weibo, WeChat, and QQ are examples of one-stop social media platforms that offer comprehensive services to users, encompassing networking, communication, entertainment, and other social functionalities enabling interactions between viewers and creators. Besides, TikTok,

Bilibili, and Zhihu are vertical social media platforms with a more focused purpose and specific users to promote better-quality content [2].

While online streaming services enhance accessibility, the abundance of drama series can lead to a saturation of content offering in a competitive environment, making it challenging for specific dramas to stand out. Particularly, the content of Chinese television dramas is categorized into three main groups: historical/political themes, social (or reform) topics, and contemporary popular culture, and within these three divisions, various genres compete for viewership [5]. Consider the classic Chinese TV series “The Legendary Siblings” (Juedai Shuangjiao) as an illustration within the historical category. Adapted from a novel with an identical name, this drama has undergone five remakes since 1977, with approximately a decade gap between each iteration. Despite the recurring use of the well-known title and the introduction of new casts in each version, captivating the audience’s interest has proven challenging.

Additionally, the proliferation of content on social media can lead to a fragmented audience engagement, as users are bombarded with various dramas’ promotional content on diverse platforms. Understanding the subtleties and inclinations of the audience within the extensive range of digital platforms becomes pivotal, and the difficulty resides in devising marketing initiatives that consistently and proficiently strike a chord with the younger demographic across various online domains. A notable example is the Chinese television drama “Eternal Love” (also known as “Ten Miles of Peach Blossoms”). This popular drama has multiple adaptations, spin-offs, and related content across various social media platforms, making it challenging to consolidate the viewer experience. As users scroll through their social media feeds, the sheer volume of random content related to the drama could dilute its impact, potentially causing them to overlook important announcements or updates on online streaming services.

3.2. Influencer and Fan Engagement

In the current landscape of Chinese television dramas, influencer collaborations, and fan engagement initiatives have become integral components of marketing strategies. Influencers, ranging from popular actors to social media personalities, are actively enlisted to amplify reach and foster audience connections. At least in television dramas, a company, tweeting and influential users, retweeting substantially enhances show viewership [6]. These collaborations extend beyond mere endorsements, often involving interactive campaigns, live Q&A sessions, and behind-the-scenes content sharing. Moreover, audiences (or fans) are commonly characterized simultaneously as consumers, engaged readers, co-creators of content, and participants in media distribution and propagation [7]. Therefore, fan engagement has transcended traditional boundaries, evolving into vibrant online communities that passionately discuss, dissect, and celebrate dramas. This engagement is sustained through character-specific social media profiles, interactive polls, virtual watch parties, and fan art contests. As a result, influencer and fan engagement drive viewership and cultivate a sense of belonging and immersive involvement.

The integration of influencers into marketing strategies for Chinese television dramas can lead to authenticity issues. When influencer endorsements come across as contrived or disconnected from the drama’s narrative, viewers might perceive them as inauthentic and resist engaging with the promoted content. For instance, the drama “Fireworks of My Heart” collaborated with several influential accounts on social media platforms such as Weibo and Douyin (TikTok), generating posts with similar glorification material. However, this strategy prompted authenticity concerns among viewers, as these feeds contradicted their feedback and perceptions. This example highlights the importance of aligning influencers with the drama’s context to avoid perceived insincerity, ensuring endorsements resonate genuinely with the audience and bolster viewer engagement.

Additionally, since online television fan communities contribute to creating captivating shows and serve as a source of immediate feedback for producers, engaging with fans and managing their expectations presents a challenge [8]. Fan communities develop high expectations for content and interactions, necessitating careful orchestration to ensure consistent engagement and avoid

disappointing the audience. Effectively managing fan expectations is a complex task faced by Chinese dramas. The television series “Reset” (Kai Duan) experienced this challenge when fans anticipated a certain romantic storyline but were disappointed when the narrative deviated. Similarly, the show “Legend of Fuyao” faced backlash as fans expected a consistent pace of character development that wasn’t met. Such instances underscore the delicate balance required to keep fan communities engaged while maintaining a cohesive narrative. Orchestrating interactions, sharing updates, and maintaining open communication with fans through platforms like Weibo and fan forums are crucial to ensure that expectations align with the drama’s trajectory.

3.3. Crossover Collaboration and Product Placement

In the realm of Chinese television, audiences exhibit a greater inclination to invest in television channels and content that present a substantial departure from their previous experiences of free viewing. In light of this, the success of Chinese television producers and distributors hinges on their capacity to deliver exceptional multi-channel programs and high-quality content that stands apart [9]. This audience significantly overlaps entertainment and e-commerce interests and creates a unique landscape.

Notably, iQiyi initiated a pioneering collaboration with JD.com, bridging the gap between e-commerce and video content giants. This convergence leverages the synergies of these industry giants’ business and brand values, resulting in an increased customer base drawn to the combined offering [10]. In essence, the effectiveness of this crossover strategy underscores the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships between key players in different sectors. By aligning their strengths, entertainment platforms can tap into their audience’s diverse interests while enhancing the perceived value of their offerings. This fusion of e-commerce and entertainment enriches the viewer experience and sets a precedent for innovative approaches to capturing the attention and loyalty of the modern consumer.

However, crossover collaborations and product placements present inherent challenges that can impact the viewer experience. One notable issue is the potential for collaborations to appear forced or incongruent with the drama’s storyline. For instance, a historical drama incorporating a modern-day tech gadget collaboration might disrupt the immersive historical atmosphere, leaving viewers bewildered and disconnected. One example is from “The Flame’s Daughter,” a crossover with a cosmetic brand that led to incongruity with the historical setting, drawing criticism from viewers.

Similarly, inadequate execution of product placements can pose problems. If a drama includes a blatant and awkward integration of a product that disrupts the narrative flow, it can result in viewer dissatisfaction. For instance, seamlessly incorporating a soft drink brand into a scene might enhance realism, but clumsily showcasing the brand and its features could be jarring for the audience, detracting from their engagement with the story. Such an issue is evident in dramas like “Modern Detective” where an awkward product placement of a shopping app disrupted the detective narrative’s flow.

4. Discussion

4.1. International Expansion and Global Reach

With numerous Chinese television drama series vying for viewership, standing out in the crowd becomes a formidable challenge. The influx of content requires marketers to strategize how to differentiate and promote specific television dramas effectively. Understanding primary approaches to how Chinese online streaming services deliver television content to their user base underpins the marketing strategies for specific dramas to capture the audience’s attention. In summary, those platforms purchase popular television series from foreign sources and traditional TV channels and initiate content creation endeavors, co-producing original content [4].

For those ready-made Chinese television dramas originating from conventional television networks, it’s time to cater to a global audience, supplementing the content primarily intended for

local viewership and reinforcing the concept of cosmopolitanism based on the universal audience's desire for knowledge acquisition and social engagement [11]. To enhance international expansion and stand out in the global market, Chinese drama series must provide accurate subtitles and dubbing options in multiple languages to address diverse linguistic backgrounds, making content more accessible and engaging for global viewers. An illustrative instance is the renowned Chinese TV series "Empresses in the Palace" (Zhen Huan Zhuan). This famous drama is available on YouTube, featuring subtitles in multiple languages, and facilitates Chinese individuals residing or studying abroad to share the show with friends from different language backgrounds. Furthermore, submitting those Chinese series to international film festivals, where they can gain exposure, critical acclaim, and recognition on a global stage, is another marketing strategy that can be implemented to foster global reach.

Additionally, for Chinese original content, developing narratives that explore universal themes and emotions; appealing to a wide range of cultural backgrounds while retaining the essence of Chinese storytelling; and collaborating with international production companies, writers, and directors to infuse global perspectives and expertise could be approaches to deliver international messages.

4.2. Focusing on Quality and Unique Content

To overcome authenticity concerns stemming from incorporating influencers into marketing tactics, the collaborations should be approached with a focus on alignment. Selecting influencers whose values resonate with the drama's themes and storyline is crucial. When authorities or celebrities genuinely connect with the content, their endorsements feel natural, enhancing the likelihood of audience engagement. Striking a balance between influencer creativity and the drama's essence can lead to more organic endorsements. As an illustration, numerous attractive videos on Douyin (TikTok) showcase influencers' reactions while watching the Chinese television series "Lost You Forever" (Chang Xiang Si). In these videos, influencers display genuine emotions and promptly share unfiltered feedback or responses after viewing specific episodes. In this manner, the drama can more readily captivate the audience's attention, fostering their active involvement.

In addition, managing interactions across social media platforms requires a holistic strategy. Each platform's unique strengths should be leveraged to create a consistent yet tailored experience in order to be more effective [3]. Engaging in conversations on platforms like Zhihu or Douban, sharing visual content on Weibo or Red, and hosting live sessions on platforms like Douyin (TikTok) can optimize fan engagement without compromising brand coherence. Balancing interactions across diverse social media platforms mandates a coordinated approach to maintain consistency while utilizing each platform's strengths. By navigating effectively, marketers can create impactful influencer partnerships, foster enthusiastic fan communities, and ensure a unified brand presence across social media platforms.

4.3. Real-time Rating and Data Analysis

Assessing digital marketing strategies can be complex, requiring the monitoring and evaluation of various metrics and data elements across numerous channels and platforms [12]. Therefore, real-time rating and data analysis have emerged as critical components in shaping the success of Chinese television dramas in the digital era. Leveraging these tools, content creators and marketers can gain insights into audience preferences, optimize strategies, and enhance viewer engagement.

Real-time rating systems provide instant feedback on how well a drama performs among viewers and the performance of crossover collaborations and product placement. Platforms like iQiyi and Tencent Video often display live viewer counts, allowing audiences to assess a drama's popularity level. This real-time feedback empowers content creators to value the immediate impact of their work and make swift adjustments if necessary. For instance, during the airing of the drama "The Untamed," the real-time ratings revealed a surge in viewership during specific plot developments, prompting the production team to tailor subsequent episodes to align with audience preferences.

Data analysis, on the other hand, delves deeper into viewer behavior, shedding light on intricate patterns and preferences. Content creators can glean valuable insights by tracking metrics like viewership duration, audience demographics, and geographic locations. For example, data analysis of the drama “Story of Yanxi Palace” unveiled that international audiences were particularly drawn to its historical setting and intricate plot, leading to strategic marketing efforts targeting these global fans. Additionally, data analysis enables content creators to optimize their narratives. During the broadcast of “Nirvana in Fire,” detailed data analysis indicated that viewers were drawn to strategic political elements rather than purely romantic aspects. This prompted the show’s producers to shift their promotional focus, resulting in increased engagement among the target audience.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key Findings

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of Chinese television dramas in the digital era has ushered in innovative marketing strategies with both advantages and challenges. Online streaming services and social media platforms like iQiyi, Tencent Video, and Weibo have revolutionized accessibility and engagement, although the plethora of content can lead to saturation. The integration of influencers, exemplified by collaborations in dramas, offers broadened reach, yet authenticity concerns can arise. Managing fan expectations requires careful navigation to maintain engagement. Crossover collaborations and product placements bridge e-commerce and entertainment, though the potential for incongruity poses challenges. Addressing these intricacies is vital for crafting effective and immersive marketing strategies that resonate with Chinese television drama audiences.

5.2. Research Significance

This research holds significant implications for the Chinese television industry and its stakeholders. Understanding the dynamics of marketing strategies in the digital era is crucial for industry players to navigate the evolving landscape effectively. By offering insights into successful practices, challenges, and their solutions, this study equips content creators, production houses, marketers, and online streaming platforms with valuable knowledge to tailor strategies that resonate with diverse audiences. Furthermore, the findings provide a roadmap for enhancing audience engagement, amplifying viewership, and fostering a global presence. Ultimately, the research enhances the business value of Chinese television dramas, facilitating informed decision-making and sustainable growth in an increasingly competitive market.

5.3. Limitations and Future Study

While this paper provides a comprehensive overview of the marketing strategies for Chinese television dramas in the digital era, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The rapidly evolving nature of the digital landscape poses challenges in maintaining up-to-date insights. Additionally, cultural and regional nuances could impact the applicability of certain strategies in different contexts. Furthermore, the paper primarily focuses on the marketing perspective, and additional research could delve into the viewer experience and perceptions of these strategies.

In a nutshell, marketing Chinese television dramas in the digital era requires a multifaceted approach encompassing online streaming services, influencer and fan engagement, and effective collaboration strategies. Navigating the challenges posed by content saturation, fan expectations, and cross-platform engagement demands careful planning and adaptability. Moreover, expanding globally entails considerations of cultural relevance and quality content creation. As the industry evolves, embracing innovative approaches and staying attuned to audience preferences will be pivotal in crafting successful marketing strategies for Chinese television dramas.

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