

Strategy Analysis for Transforming Low Loyalty and Spurious Loyalty Consumers: A Case Study of ANTA

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Abstract. In the context of the thriving sports sector, ANTA has made a notable impact on consumers by generously sponsoring the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, the primary focus of customers lies on the Chinese delegation rather than the ANTA brand itself, resulting in a diminished and misleading sense of devotion towards the company. The study aimed to investigate strategies for converting consumers with low and deceptive loyalty into highly loyal ones, focusing on the ANTA brand as a case study. Hence, the present study aims to accomplish the below objectives: To begin with, the objective is to examine the causes and attributes of consumer low and deceptive loyalty behaviors. Furthermore, a comprehensive examination of the brand image of ANTA is necessary to ascertain the crucial elements that contribute to the augmentation of client loyalty. To enhance customer loyalty towards the ANTA brand, it is necessary to devise and execute a range of marketing strategies and initiatives, such as brand promotion, product innovation, user experience, and long-term development. This will also involve offering recommendations for ANTA and other sports companies.

Keywords: Sports brand, Marketing strategy, Brand loyalty, Sports consumption.

1. Introduction

With China successfully hosting the Olympic Games twice and significant government backing for mass sports, people's interest in the sports business is growing. With the ubiquitous usage of media technologies, viewing live and televised events on video platforms has become the norm, and sports event viewership on key platforms is increasing year after year. On February 21st, the NBA announced the viewership and ratings for the 2024 All-Star Game and other contests. According to data, 11.6 million unique people watched the 2024 NBA All-Star Game on stations like as TNT, TBS, truTV, and B/R Sports, representing a 20% increase over the previous year [1]. During All-Star Weekend, the average audience for different competitions was 5.5 million, up 14% over the previous year [1]. Furthermore, the impact of sports stars is growing. With an expanding number of social media followers, sports players' activities, conduct, and endorsements may have a big influence on fans and viewers, making them appealing options for brand collaborations [1].

In this context, more and more brands are entering the field of sports event sponsorship and endorsements by sports stars, leading to increasingly fierce competition in the sports brand market. The entire sports brand market is showing a trend towards diversification and digital marketing. More sports events are becoming operationally IP-based, driving brand value through the commercialization of events, with cross-industry collaborations on the rise. As one of China's leading sports equipment brands, Anta is a comprehensive sports goods company. The company's positioning standard targets the general public, focusing on providing the best value-for-money professional sports goods to the widest range of ordinary consumers. Anta's main brand, through promotion and sponsorship of major events like the Olympics, has seen significant development in recent years. In the past two years, Anta's sales and market share have grown, especially in the basketball shoe and running shoe markets. Additionally, Anta's online sales have shown rapid growth, indicating success in digital marketing and e-commerce channels. In 2022, Anta reached a market share of 22.6% in China, ranking second in the Chinese sports brand market and becoming one of the primary choices for many consumers.

In the past, marketing research on the ANTA brand has presented several insights, mainly categorized into the following viewpoints: Taking the papers of scholars such as Yang and Li as examples, this viewpoint primarily focuses on the research combining digital marketing with social media. Through data analysis and case studies, it evaluates the promotional effects of the integration of ANTA with emerging media channels [2, 3]. For instance, scholars like Wang and Xie mainly compare sports brands from multiple countries to study the market positioning and competitive relationships of major sports brands, providing development recommendations for Chinese sports brands [4]. Taking the research of scholars such as Li, Zhang, and Chen as examples, this type of research primarily conducts an in-depth understanding of consumers' awareness, loyalty, and purchasing behavior towards the ANTA brand through questionnaire surveys [5, 6].

However, there is still a lack of detailed research on how the company image of Anta affects the main brand of Anta and how to transform spurious loyalty into high loyalty. This study aims to analyze the current market situation of the Anta brand, consumer loyalty status, and competitor situations, understand the position and image of the Anta brand in consumers' minds, and propose clear research questions based on background and conceptual foundations. Specifically, how to enhance consumer loyalty towards the Anta brand and convert low- and spurious-loyalty consumers into highly loyal consumers. The research motivation is that improving consumer loyalty to the brand can enhance brand competitiveness, influence, and market share, help the Anta brand better understand consumer behavior and needs, enhance the relationship between the brand and consumers, and increase consumer loyalty, thus boosting brand market share and competitiveness. Through the example of Anta, this study aims to provide development suggestions for other sports brands and promote the healthy development of various sports brands.

The main research question of this study focuses on how to convert consumers with low loyalty and spurious loyalty into more loyal consumers. Using the case analysis, the study mainly uses Anta as a case study to delve into how to transform consumers with low loyalty and spurious loyalty into more loyal consumers.

2. Case Description

Anta Group is a comprehensive sports goods organization in China, with a business portfolio that includes a wide range of sporting and outdoor items. Anta was created in 1991 and listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange's main board in 2007. From 1991 until 1996, Anta focused on OEM production. From 1997 to 2012, it switched to a brand wholesale model, and from 2013 to 2015, it led the way in implementing a retail transformation plan. Since then, Anta's growth has progressed toward globalization, nationalization, and diversification. Anta began as a footwear manufacturer before expanding into sportswear, outdoor items, and other areas of industry. Anta's success in the Chinese market increased as the brand developed. Anta increased its global commercial presence by acquiring globally famous brands. The corporation has bought well-known sports brands such as Wilson in the United States, JJB Sports in France, and Amer Sports in Finland, boosting its globalization strategy. While developing its product range, Anta was also actively involved in sports sponsorship and collaboration, forming relationships with well-known sports organizations such as the NBA, the Olympic Games, and the International Association of Athletics Federations. Meanwhile, it has been designated as the International Olympic Committee's official sports gear supplier from 2024 to 2027.

Since sponsoring the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022, Anta Group and its main brand Anta have seen a considerable gain in consumer awareness. According to data, the successful staging of the Beijing Winter Olympics increased sales of several sponsored companies. According to data, Anta Group benefited significantly from the Winter Olympics, with its flagship store on Taobao (a comprehensive shopping platform in China) achieving sales of 104 million yuan from February 4th to 18th (during the Beijing Winter Olympics), a 29% increase over the previous period of 80.49 million yuan from January 20th to February 3rd. Furthermore, Anta's sales and volume data from February 4th to 19th revealed repeated peaks, and its "volume" across

multiple data platforms hit a historic high. During the Beijing Winter Olympics, Anta's flagship store on the Tmall platform (China's comprehensive shopping website) had the highest gross merchandise volume. Among these, things tied to the Winter Olympics national flag gained great interest, with daily incremental searches for Olympic-themed items ranging from 500,000 to 1.7 million. Anta's champion and national flag goods not only saw considerable price hikes, but they also garnered widespread awareness among customers. According to Business Observer statistics, motivated by the enthusiasm of the Winter Olympics opening ceremony, Anta's official flagship store on JD.com experienced a 203% year-on-year rise in down jacket sales and a 196% increase in Descente down jacket sales. Among the top ten goods in Anta's official flagship shop on Tmall, sales of the champion series and national flag products increased significantly. Tmall data reveals that from New Year's Eve to the fourth day of the Lunar New Year, sales of skiing equipment on the platform climbed by more than 180%, while sales of ice sports equipment increased by more than 300%. MIRROR statistics show that in January, before the Spring Festival, Tmall's sales of skiing equipment reached 188 million yuan, a 66% year-on-year rise; sales of ski apparel reached 127 million yuan, a 55% year-on-year increase.

Because of the Olympic spirit and the influence of the Chinese delegation, many shoppers, regardless of whether they like Anta's attire, have made purchases. For two similar articles of apparel, the one with the national flag emblazoned on it costs roughly 200 yuan more than the same style without it. Overall, Anta's choice to sponsor the Olympics has had a major impact on consumer purchasing behavior, as well as Anta's brand image and market position, demonstrating the tremendous influence that the collaboration between Anta and the Olympics has offered to consumers. However, following the Olympics, Anta's conversation and visibility on key platforms declined due to a loss of exposure from event sponsorships. Many consumers who made purchases during the Olympics did not continue to shop thereafter. Anta's other items are significantly less well-known than the champion and national flag collections, and customers' concept of the Anta brand has remained unchanged. Many consumers continue to show poor or false loyalty.

3. Analysis on Problems

3.1. The Influence of National Sentiment During the Olympics is Not Long-lasting

ANTA items may be purchased by Chinese customers at significant national events like the Olympics, driven by patriotic feelings or a shared sense of community honor. The observed purchase behavior may not necessarily exhibit a direct correlation with the individual's genuine preference or brand loyalty. After the conclusion of the event, the impact of national feeling progressively declines, leading to a proportional drop in customers' attention towards the ANTA brand. ANTA achieves significant publicity during the Olympic Games as a result of the heavy media coverage of the Chinese delegation and its clothing supplier. Nevertheless, beyond the Olympic season, there are fewer chances for customers to encounter pertinent information. As the event approaches its conclusion, the sales growth often diminishes. Consumers' focus reverts to their everyday routines and individual inclinations, frequently leading to less enthusiasm for the ANTA brand.

Numerous studies within the realm of consumer behavior investigate the influence of emotions and social variables on the process of making purchase decisions. For example, according to social identity theory, individuals have the potential to link their identity with a certain group or event within particular situations, which can then impact their purchasing behavior [8]. During the Olympic Games, individuals often establish a strong connection between their own identity and the Chinese delegation, resulting in increased focus on ANTA as the provider of apparel. Nevertheless, the primary focus of customers lies on the Chinese delegation rather than the ANTA brand itself. Following the conclusion of the event, in the absence of the particular Olympic environment, customers' perceptions of ANTA tend to diminish organically. Moreover, the enthusiasm surrounding the Olympics predominantly influences the Chinese market and Chinese consumers, whereas it does not have an equivalent degree of favorable influence on other global markets or consumers. This observation underscores the

necessity for ANTA to develop a robust brand value system that is not reliant on isolated occurrences and can effectively cater to the varied demands of customers on a global scale.

3.2. Lack of Brand Differentiation

The sporting goods business is extremely competitive, with several brands providing comparable products and services. If ANTA fails to distinguish itself from rivals in areas such as product design, technical innovation, and brand image, customers may migrate to other companies. ANTA falls behind multinational firms in terms of product innovation and technology adoption. In terms of product design, whether through independent design or co-branding with IPs, ANTA leans too much on foreign products, resulting in a lack of original characteristics. The "national trend" idea has not been included in product design, making it difficult to promote the brand image and attract customers. Its technical research and development capabilities are similarly inadequate. Looking at online items, the emphasis is mostly on carbon plate technology in professional sports shoes and anti-cutting technology in national team clothing for the Winter Olympics, which lacks the technical experience required by mainstream consumer groups. When product features are not clearly defined, customers may have a hazy understanding of the ANTA brand, and an erroneous brand image can easily lead to doubt within the target consumer base.

On the other hand, ANTA lacks a widely recognized advertising slogan similar to Nike's iconic "Just do it." Extensive research has demonstrated that when a product's advertising, sponsorship endorsements, and product characteristics are aligned, consumer purchase intentions experience a significant boost [9]. In their study, Yu and his colleagues discussed how sports stars transcend advertising to become symbols that stand for memories as a result of the abstract system of consumer society. When a sports star's image no longer matches the expectations of their fans, the community can become very delicate and may start to crumble [10]. When sports brands select sports stars, if the promotional concept or endorsement image becomes disconnected from the product itself, it may result in a decline in consumer trust in the brand, which can impact consumer loyalty. Despite ANTA's efforts to secure endorsements from prominent athletes, consumers perceive these endorsements as lacking a strong connection to the brand image. As a result, they fail to establish a lasting brand association in consumers' minds, unlike Nike's iconic Air Jordan series of sneakers.

Research on brand differentiation and brand loyalty also provides some insights into this phenomenon. For example, the product differentiation theory suggests that consumers are more likely to develop loyalty to products with distinct differentiating features [11]. For instance, when Nike is mentioned, one thinks of basketball shoes, so most basketball enthusiasts are more inclined to choose Nike as their primary option when purchasing new sports gear.

3.3. There is A Discrepancy between Brand Association and Brand Positioning

The brand positioning of ANTA is that it is a comprehensive, multi-brand sports goods brand specializing in the design, production, and sale of sports shoes, apparel, accessories, and other sports equipment. However, consumers have insufficient awareness of the concept of a "sports goods brand."

This scenario can be attributed to three primary factors. Initially, altering the enduring perception of the brand in customers' thoughts is challenging. Before ANTA's sponsorship of the Winter Olympics, the brand's public advertising and the prevailing perception among consumers classified it as a brand primarily associated with everyday leisure sports, with its sports-related characteristics being considered of lesser importance. Consequently, ANTA's customer demographic mostly comprises regular consumers rather than individuals with a specific interest in sports, resulting in diminished brand loyalty among these customers.

Furthermore, brand associations lack professionalism. ANTA operates in a variety of product areas; nevertheless, the recreational benefits of each product outweigh their professional use. Attracting a devoted consumer base of sports lovers to purchase ANTA-branded things is a huge problem. Moreover, the appellations of ANTA Group and the ANTA brand have the potential to cause

confusion in customers' brand associations. Consumers typically use the term ANTA Group to communicate their opinions about the ANTA brand since the word is synonymous with the company's core brand. ANTA Group has acquired various sports brands that appeal to a wide range of client groups, including sports, leisure, and affluent populations. This phenomenon has the potential to drive customers to associate other ANTA Group products with the ANTA brand, resulting in a reduction in the consumer base.

As a result, ANTA must address the present disparity between brand association and brand positioning while also strengthening the relationship and alignment between the two. Previous studies have also indicated that brand image congruence has a partly mediational role in brand loyalty. Brand image congruence refers to the compatibility of customers with brands or products, which has a beneficial influence on purchase intentions. The better customers perceive the match between the brand and the product, the greater their buy intention [12].

4. Suggestion

4.1. Establishing Long-Term Brand Value

Given the limited enduring influence of national enthusiasm during the Olympics on customer purchasing behavior, it is imperative to devise measures aimed at preserving and augmenting the brand's enduring worth. The subsequent recommendations are derived from an analysis of emotional and social elements that exert influence on consumer purchase decisions.

4.1.1 Strengthening Brand Stories and Cultural Values

In the forthcoming marketing endeavors, it is imperative to not just emphasize nationalistic sentiments and the essence of competitive athletics but also to further delve into the cultural relevance and values associated with the brand. The establishment of an emotional connection with consumers may be achieved through the emphasis on brand values in large-scale event promotions. As an illustration, Nike's brand narrative centers on the slogan "Just Do It," which transcends being merely an advertising slogan and has evolved into a mindset that motivates individuals to strive for greatness and push their boundaries. Nike demonstrates its unwavering dedication to athletic excellence and its commitment to assisting individuals in reaching their highest potential by supporting elite athletes and sporting events, as well as introducing groundbreaking goods.

Nike has effectively incorporated brand narratives and cultural principles into the process of product creation, marketing endeavors, and initiatives related to social responsibility. This strategic approach has resulted in the establishment of robust emotional bonds and brand allegiance, positioning Nike as a highly renowned and esteemed sports brand on a worldwide scale.

4.1.2 Continued Investment in Sports and Youth Sports Development

ANTA may improve its long-term relationship with the sports sector by sponsoring local sporting events and funding youth sports education and training programs. Nike, for example, promotes youth sports development through a variety of channels, including the "Nike Youth Sports Program," which aims to inspire young people to participate in sports and lead healthy lifestyles. This strategy links the company with the sports business in a long-term, consistent manner.

4.1.3 Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development

The efficacy of a brand is contingent upon the information, emotions, visuals, and auditory experiences that consumers acquire. Consequently, companies are progressively engaging in the dissemination of their social endeavors to customers [13]. In order to cultivate a favorable brand image and foster customer brand loyalty, ANTA has the potential to augment its commitment to social responsibility and environmental preservation. This may be achieved by initiatives such as endorsing the advancement of youth sports and adopting eco-friendly materials. As an illustration, Adidas, by means of the Parley for the Oceans partnership initiative, manufactures athletic footwear from

repurposed ocean plastic, showcasing its dedication to safeguarding the environment, bolstering its brand reputation, and appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

4.2. Strengthening Innovation and Product Differentiation

4.2.1 Increasing Investment in Product Research and Development

Continued investment in product research and development to introduce innovative products that not only lead in technology but also meet consumers' aesthetic needs in design. Consumer demands and preferences are dynamic and influenced by various factors, such as social trends, technological advancements, and lifestyle changes. Innovation can help brands respond promptly to these changes by offering new products or services to meet consumers' latest needs, thereby maintaining brand relevance and appeal. In intense market competition, innovation is an important means for a brand to differentiate itself from its competitors. By introducing unique products or services, a brand can establish a unique market position, attracting consumers seeking fresh experiences and functionalities, thereby gaining a competitive advantage. Brands can leverage the increased brand exposure during the Olympics to launch innovative products and technologies, such as simplifying the technology used in the sponsorship apparel for the Chinese delegation and applying it to products aimed at general consumers to meet diverse consumer needs and enhance brand competitiveness.

4.2.2 Establishing a Personalized Media Community

Enhance digital marketing and social media interaction, utilize digital marketing tools and social media platforms to precisely target the intended consumers, provide personalized marketing content, and increase the brand's visibility and engagement. Research results indicate that consumers who engage with social media brand communities in the mass market may develop positive attitudes towards the brand, such as trust and loyalty, and consumer brand identification plays a fundamental role in converting consumer-brand community interaction into consumer-brand relationships [14].

4.2.3 Maximizing the Promotional Role of Short Videos

Short videos can be employed as a means to exhibit product innovation and technological attributes. By creating concise videos, ANTA products can effectively showcase their innovative features and technological advantages. These videos can highlight specialized materials employed in production, design concepts, and functional features, thereby emphasizing the distinctiveness of the product.

Promote the dissemination of user experiences by utilizing concise video channels, encouraging users to contribute their firsthand accounts and narratives of utilizing ANTA goods. The genuine feedback provided by users can function as a form of word-of-mouth marketing, enhancing the trustworthiness and attractiveness of the brand.

4.3. Establishing Clear Brand Positioning and Strengthening Consumer Brand Associations

The objective of this study is to convert consumers with low loyalty or false loyalty into more loyal consumers by examining the distinction between brand associations and brand positioning. The offered solutions, derived from the integration of case studies, prioritize the cultivation of a devoted client base within certain industries while concurrently strengthening the current consumer demographic. The objective is to establish a stable brand image and cultivate a strong sense of brand loyalty among skiing lovers.

4.3.1 Positioning ANTA's Brand Image as a Professional Skiing Brand

Establish brand distinction by tightly linking the brand image with skiing. Integrate distinctive designs into the merchandise. One potential approach is to use the services of skilled designers to develop ski gear designs. For instance, a logo for ANTA may be designed to incorporate skiing features, with the particular aim of promoting skiing items and developing a consistent style. Furthermore, it is recommended to enhance the advertising campaign for skiing items. The primary objective is to augment consumers' connections between the brand and the sport of skiing. By

engaging in partnerships with prominent skiing athletes for endorsements and capitalizing on the visibility and esteemed reputation of the Winter Olympics, the business may enhance its brand image.

4.3.2 Enhancing Consumers' Perception of ANTA's Professionalism in the Skiing Product Field

Increase research investment in skiing products, enhance product performance, and reinforce consumers' impressions of the brand's professionalism in the skiing product field. Improve the breathability, waterproofing, and insulation of skiing apparel; enhance the structure of skiing boards, such as snow boots that make it easier for beginners to walk on snow.

Moreover, introduce more specialized and personalized pre-sales and after-sales services to enhance consumers' shopping experiences. Provide basic skiing knowledge training for store staff to assist customers in product selection and purchase; offer online after-sales services. Expand product segmentation in the skiing field based on the existing industry chain. Introduce product segments tailored for activities like snow skiing, alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, etc., linking consumers' brand associations with professional skiing equipment brands.

4.3.3 Broadening the Consumer Market

In order to effectively penetrate the global market, it is imperative to prioritize product research and development, alongside customized promotional initiatives that cater to diverse nations. Integrate diverse cultural elements, societal patterns, and traditions from other nations into the goods by employing focused product design and marketing strategies. Create diverse series, such as series tailored to certain countries, with the aim of enticing skiing fans from other nations and cultivating their loyalty as ANTA consumers.

5. Conclusion

This article conducts research on the issue of low loyalty or spurious loyalty among consumers of Chinese sports brand ANTA in the context of increasing attention towards the sports industry and intense competition in the sports brand market. This study looks at why ANTA customers aren't very loyal or are only somewhat loyal, including the short-term effect of the Olympics on national mood, the lack of brand differentiation, and differences between brand association and brand positioning. It then makes specific suggestions for building long-term brand value, improving innovation and product differentiation, and making consumers more loyal to the brand.

The research findings of this study can provide valuable references for the following groups, companies, and markets: Marketing professionals can draw upon the methods and strategies mentioned in the paper to implement targeted marketing plans for low- and high-loyalty consumers, thereby increasing consumer brand loyalty. ANTA and other sports brand companies can learn from the successful cases and experiences listed in the paper to guide their own brand management and market promotion strategies, thus enhancing consumer loyalty towards their brands. Additionally, this study provides some direction and inspiration for future research.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that this study may include several drawbacks, such as suboptimal sample selection and a small sample size. The study's sample size is deemed to be rather inadequate, primarily concentrating on the primary brand of ANTA Group. Furthermore, the research methodologies employed in this study were insufficiently complete, predominantly focusing on case analysis and perhaps lacking in statistical analysis techniques. Consequently, there is a need for future enhancement in this particular domain.

In summary, this study offers valuable research findings and insights for the relevant field. However, future learning and research processes should focus on enhancing the credibility and practicality of the study through further improvements in research design, data analysis, and other relevant aspects.

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