

Optimization Analysis of Brand Communication Strategies for Champion in the China Region

Han Jin¹, Shenghao Rong², Zichen Su³, and Zimo Zhu^{4, *}

¹ Institute of physical culture, Kunming University of Science and Technology, Yunnan, 650031, China

² Canadian Academy, Kobe, 6580032, Japan

³ Nanjing NO.1 middle school, Nanjing, 210000, China

⁴ Beijing NO.80 high school, Beijing, 100102, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 202004033119@stu.sdp.edu.cn

Abstract. Champion is established in 1919; it is known for its high-quality athletic wear and also its durable and innovative sportswear. This thesis will take Champion as the research object to find how to make brands become more competitive in today's market by researching its history, strategy and its status. In the 1930s Champion has introduced the iconic hooded sweatshirt. Champion also invented a technology called reverse weave which prevent clothes from shrinking. The brand has a huge fanbase among the young generation where it keeps collaborate with designers and influencers. This has helped champion expand its product range in both traditional athletic wear and the new trending fashion. Because Champions new innovation and design, it leads to more and more people trust and select this brand. Champion should continue to deepen its exploration and practice in the aspects of youth and digitalization. Through more accurate market positioning, personalized communication content and innovative interactive experiences, Champion is expected to further close the distance with young consumers and inspire their brand loyalty and desire to buy. At the same time, Champion should also focus on issues such as sustainability and social responsibility, and actively communicate positive energy and brand values.

Keywords: Champion, Strategies, TikTok, Innovation.

1. Introduction

In China, as people's living standards have improved and the reform and opening-up policy has been implemented, more and more brands have started to enter the Chinese market, leading to increased competition among brands as the variety of products available has also increased. For example, the brand update iteration is fast, and the continuous emergence of small brands leads to fierce competition among brands. At the same time, with the popularity of online shopping, online sales have become another battlefield for brand competition, which makes brands need to consider the right marketing methods and strategies, because marketing can effectively help increase sales. For example, TikTok pointed out in its 2023 report that by proactively discovering customer needs, the total merchandise transaction of TikTok e-commerce has increased by 80% year-on-year [1]. Therefore how to continuously attract consumers through marketing strategies, increase sales, and stand out among numerous brands has become a problem that various brands need to consider. Additionally, as consumers' needs and preferences continue to change, how to achieve sustainable development, continuously innovate to cater to consumers' changing tastes has become a huge challenge for many brands. Champion, a brand with a long history, is very worth studying and discussing in terms of its development trajectory and communication strategies. Champion once gained the love of many consumers with its modernized hooded sweatshirts, making it popular in China for a while. However, in recent years, with the establishment of other clothing brands and the prevalence of counterfeit products in the market, Champion's sales in China have declined. According to statistics, the operating losses of Champion's business were approximately HK\$52 million and HK\$34 million in 2022 and the first half of 2023, respectively. However, after PEAK International

took over the sales rights of Champion in China, its sales have improved significantly, indicating that Champion still has development space and potential in China [1]. However, how a Champion can leverage its advantages and unleash its potential in the constantly evolving market is the key to enhancing its competitiveness in the Chinese market. Therefore, this thesis will take Champion as the research object to find how to make brands become more competitive in today's market by researching its history, strategy and its status.

2. The Development Status of The Brand

Champion is a well-known sportswear brand that is mainly focused on brand development and marketing. It has a high consumer demand in country like America, Europe and parts of Asia, and operates in more than 90 countries, with mostly hailing its business outside North America. Champion has factories all over the world which include country like EL Salvador, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. In addition, Champion employs up to 10% of recycled fibers contributing to the reduction of plastic bottle usage. Champion has emerged as a pioneer in eco-friendly fashion by using up to 10% recycled materials in their designs. Like by reducing the use of virgin plastics and reusing materials like plastic bottles this effort is a part of a larger initiative to reduce environmental impact. Customers respond favorably to these initiatives a survey reveals that 39% of U. S. S. Owners of sportswear favor donning Champion. Due to the industry-wide impact of this consumer preference big rivals like Nike and Adidas have been compelled to incorporate recycled materials into their own merchandise collections. These brands help lessen the environmental impact of the clothing manufacturing process the need for new plastics and the total amount of plastic waste produced by the industry by implementing these sustainable practices. According to Alexander Kunst this change demonstrates the fashion industries growing emphasis on sustainability and how it affects consumer decisions and brand strategies [1, 2]. Currently Champion has sponsors 29 NBA teams and it is also a major sponsor for the U.S Major league. Champion has opened its first flagship store on September 10, 2018, in China. On the first day of opening where customers have to wait more than an hour to come into the store. Champion's ability to adapt the trend and different changes of the Chinese market has led to the success in China. Champion has entered the Chinese market faster than other brands like MLB and Koreas Chuu, so Champion h as a head start. After that Champion has continues to open stores in China including MH mall in Mission Hills New Town, Guangdong Joy Mall, and more. On 2023 September 21, Wang JunKai has been the first brand spokesperson in China. Because of JunKai's popularity and huge fanbase in China it can strengthen its presence in the Chinese Market. Champion's success is drive by its commitment to the quality and different strategic Marketing.

However, in the other hand, at 2019 Champion has a net worth of 4, 036, 33.00 pound and it has significantly decreased to 1,075,433.00 pound because of the public pressure on Hanesbrands to increase its revenues and reduce debt, this leads to Champion's sales fell by 14% in the first half of 2023 and continually decrease to 25% at the end of the year. In the recent earning report Hanes Brands has mention the unexpected decrease, where leading to Hanesbrands selling Champion because of the \$4.2 billion of debt and the lowered sales, and eventually Hanesbrands has sold Champion to Authentic Brand Group in a deal up to 1.6 billion.

Despite these challenges, Champion is still a brand that's has a lot of potential for recovery and growth. Where focusing on quality and innovative marketing can be a good option to help the brand regain its footing.

3. Brand Communication Status

3.1. Celebrity Signing

Champion signed Wang Junkai as its Greater China Area spokesperson, attracting a lot of fans' attention .After becoming the brand ambassador, Wang Junkai introduced a limited edition clothing

line in his capacity as a brand designer. Meanwhile, he participated in the shooting of the brand's advertisement, promoting the uniqueness of Champion.

3.2. Social Media Promotion

Champion released promotional videos of its products on Weibo, TikTok and other social media platforms. On TikTok, Champion used short videos to introduce its products in a lighthearted and creative way. Unlike TikTok, Champion promoted its brand stories on Weibo through pictures, videos, and long articles. They also promoted its products through live streaming, increasing the interaction between the brand and consumers. At the same time, it expanded its sales channels and attracted more customers.

3.3. Event Sponsorship

Champion sponsored sports events such as NBA to showcase the quality and uniqueness of its clothing in front of the public, and increased its brand awareness by relying on the popularity of the event.

3.4. Sustainable Development

Champion has always adhered to the concept of sustainable production, producing clothes with environmentally friendly materials and production processes, thereby reducing pollution to the environment. At the same time, it conducts offline public welfare activities to demonstrate the enterprise's sense of responsibility and mission. This can make customers who purchase products more inclined and trustful of Champion's products, increasing brand identity.

3.5. Current Status

Champion's sales have been declining continuously, leading to its eventual acquisition by ABG Company. At the same time, because Champion has transformed from a trendy brand to a mass-market brand, some consumers who value individuality and uniqueness no longer choose Champion. As brand competition intensifies, Champion's pressure is gradually increasing. However, Champion's future is still worth looking forward to. Firstly, as a brand management company, ABG has considerable experience in managing brands on the brink of bankruptcy. Therefore, Champion may be able to revive itself through product transformation or changing its communication strategy under ABG's management. Secondly, Champion can shape products that meet the tastes and needs of current consumers through product innovation and enhanced market promotion, thereby regaining consumer affection.

4. Advantages of Champion Brand Communication

4.1. Long Brand History and Popularity

As a sports brand with more than 100 years of history, Champion's profound cultural heritage is a major advantage in its market communication. This historical accumulation not only gives the brand a unique charm, but also enhances the consumer's sense of trust and identity for the brand, which provides a solid brand foundation for its dissemination in the domestic market.

4.2. Rich Product Line, Extensive Coverage

Champion's product line covers all types of clothing for men and women, such as T-shirts, hoodies, coats, sweatpants, as well as footwear and accessories to meet the needs of different consumers. This rich product line helps to increase the brand's market coverage and customer satisfaction.

4.3. Omni-channel Marketing Strategy

Champion has adopted a multi-channel marketing strategy combining online and offline in the domestic market, reaching consumers through e-commerce platforms, social media, physical stores and other channels. To achieve a full range of consumer coverage. This strategy not only increases brand exposure and brand loyalty, but also provides consumers with a convenient shopping experience [3].

4.4. Integration of Trend Elements

In recent years, Champion has actively cooperated with various well-known brands to launch products with trend elements. This integration of trend elements not only attracts the attention of young consumers, but also enhances the brand's influence in the fashion circle.

4.5. Localization Marketing Strategy

In order to better adapt to the Chinese market, Champion adopted a local marketing strategy. For example, signing local spokesmen, participating in local popular variety shows, these measures help to enhance the brand's visibility and reputation in China.

5. The Brand Communication of ChampionI

5.1. Fake Goods and Infringement Issues

Champion faces serious problems of fake goods and trademark infringement in the domestic market. There are a large number of fake and highly imitated products of Champion in the market, which not only damages the brand image, but also makes consumers doubt the authenticity of the products and affects the brand image and reputation [4].

5.2. Fierce Market Competition

Domestic sportswear market competition is fierce, not only Nike, Adidas and other international brands strong competition, as well as the rise of many local brands. This makes Champion face greater competitive pressure in the market and need to constantly innovate and optimize strategies to maintain competitiveness.

5.3. Lack of Brand Differentiation

In the highly competitive domestic sportswear market, Champion faces fierce competition from many domestic and foreign brands. Although the brand has a certain degree of popularity and historical heritage, in some aspects, such as product design, brand story, etc., it fails to fully show the difference with other brands. This can lead to confusion among consumers, making it difficult to clearly distinguish Champion from other brands [5].

5.4. Brand Aging Problem

Although Champion has a long history, in a rapidly changing market environment, the problem of brand aging is gradually emerging. This is mainly reflected in the lack of novelty and innovation in product design, marketing strategies, etc., which is difficult to attract the continuous attention of young consumers [6].

5.5. Agent Management Problems

In the Chinese market, the agent management of Champion is also concerned. The game and competition between different agents can lead to uneven performance of brands in the market, which in turn affects consumers' purchasing experience and brand loyalty. Brands need to strengthen the management and training of agents to ensure the consistency of brand image and product quality.

5.6. Lack of Brand Differentiation

In the highly competitive domestic sportswear market, Champion faces fierce competition from many domestic and foreign brands. Although the brand has a certain degree of popularity and historical heritage, in some aspects, such as product design, brand story, etc., it fails to fully show the difference with other brands. This can lead to confusion among consumers, making it difficult to clearly distinguish Champion from other brands.

5.7. Inadequate Dissemination of Brand Stories

Brand stories are an important part of brand culture and an important factor in attracting consumers. However, in the domestic market, Champion may not have sufficiently spread its brand story. Consumers may not know enough about the origin, development, brand concept and other aspects of the brand, which may lead to the lack of consumer identity and loyalty to the brand.

6. Brand Optimization Suggestion

6.1. Strengthen the Communication between the Brand and Target Customers

Champion was relatively late to the game when it came to social media and digital marketing. For example, on TikTok, champion's competitors like Nike have 6.3 million followers while champion has only 143.6 million followers. It is clear that Champion's investment and strategy in this area was not aggressive enough when its competitors were already heavily promoting and building a large fan base on social media. Some opportunities to connect with younger consumers were missed. There are a few things that champion can improve in this situation. The first is to increase the frequency of Posting and ensure that there is enough quality content to attract and keep viewers interested. The second is to increase advertising spending on social media platforms such as TikTok. They can use the platform's precision advertising function to ensure that ads can reach the target audience and improve the brand's exposure. The most important thing to do to grow fans is to actively engage with them, respond to comments and private messages in a timely manner, and demonstrate brand affinity and customer care. At the same time, User feedback can guide the creation of A/B testing hypotheses for a brand. By using A/B testing tools and methods, different content and messaging approaches can be tested to determine what resonates most with the audience. A/B testing provides empirical data on which strategies are most effective, helping companies make data-driven decisions and optimize content and messaging to improve fan conversion rates [7].

6.2. Innovative Publicity Methods

Champion should be active in creating interactive content, challenges, behind-the-scenes videos, and quickly respond to new trends to attract creative and engaged users. Champion's TikTok view counts are significantly boosted by some content that resonates with people's everyday life, such as GRWM (Get Ready with Me) or OOTD (Outfits of the Day). For instance, the beauty brand Y.O.U, which once took the Southeast Asian market by storm, serves as a great example. Y.O.U seized the key point of "self-awakening," which resonates deeply with users, and launched the #WouldYouLoveYou brand challenge on TikTok. Once initiated, the brand challenge garnered significant attention from local women, accumulating 5.5 billion views and over 300,000 interactions under the #WouldYouLoveYou hashtag. Continuously, female users participated in the challenge to express themselves and share their heartfelt thoughts, voluntarily becoming "spokespersons" for Y.O.U. Therefore, Champion can showcase more content about authenticity and relatability towards social media users.

6.3. Strengthen Partnerships with Celebrities or Brands

Champion can involve influencers or athletes in the creation of content that showcases the Champion products. They can produce content such as workout tutorials, styling tips, vlogs, or

unboxing that feature Champion gear. Those who have co-branding production can also showcase the behind-the-scenes contents of the design process. Stephen Curry's cooperation with Under Armour serves as a similar example." Curry has taken on the role of president for the Curry Brand, overseeing the brand's business strategy and marketing. Curry Brand is a significant sub-brand under Armour, similar to the relationship between Nike and Air Jordan. This collaboration has resulted in the launch of several signature shoes and innovative product technologies, embedding Curry's influence into the brand and boosting Under Armour's market share.

6.4. Expand Publicity Channels

Champion has done a lot of pop-up events to interact with consumers. Open workshops are conducted to make consumers more aware of their products. Member exclusive events can increase customer bonding. Lululemon invites their customers to attend lululemon's yoga class with lululemon's products, which can increase customer's awareness of the advantages of their products. Co-creating fan meetings with ambassadors can also be effective in gaining exposure. In addition, Champion can engage influencers or athletes in community and social cause initiatives, such as environmental sustainability campaigns, charity runs, or fitness boot camps, aligning with values important to consumers.

6.5. Focus on Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility

In the process of brand communication, focus on sustainable development and social responsibility transmission. Through the use of environmentally friendly materials, the promotion of green production methods and other measures to demonstrate the brand's commitment to environmental protection and contribution. At the same time, actively participate in social welfare activities to enhance brand image and social responsibility. The optimization of Champion's brand communication strategy in China should focus on brand positioning, marketing strategy innovation, consumer interaction, brand culture communication and sustainable development, so as to enhance the brand's market competitiveness and consumer awareness.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, in the dynamic and competitive market of China, Champion has successfully consolidated its leading position in the field of sportswear and further broadened its brand influence through a series of well-planned brand communication strategy optimization. By digging deep into the brand's history and culture, Champion has built a story-filled and emotionally resonant brand image that effectively touches and engages consumers.

In terms of communication means, Champion keeps up with the pace of The Times and makes full use of social media, celebrity endorsement and diversified marketing strategies linked online and offline to achieve extensive dissemination and deep penetration of brand information. This all-round communication mode not only enhances the popularity of Champion, but also deepens consumers' cognition and favorable impression of the brand.

Looking ahead, the road of brand communication for Champion in the Chinese market is still full of opportunities and challenges. With the rise of young consumer groups and the advent of the digital age, Champion should continue to deepen its exploration and practice in the aspects of youth and digitalization. Through more accurate market positioning, personalized communication content and innovative interactive experiences, Champion is expected to further close the distance with young consumers and inspire their brand loyalty and desire to buy.

At the same time, Champion should also focus on issues such as sustainability and social responsibility, and actively communicate positive energy and brand values.

By participating in public welfare activities and promoting environmental protection concepts, Champion can not only win the respect and trust of more consumers, but also establish a good brand image in a highly competitive market environment.

In short, the optimization of brand communication strategy in the Chinese market has achieved remarkable results. In the future, Champion should continue to innovate and make breakthroughs on the basis of maintaining its existing advantages, and meet the new challenges of market changes and consumer demand with a more open and inclusive attitude. In the coming days, Champion will shine more brightly in the Chinese market.

6.4 Deepen brand story and cultural communication
Fully explore and disseminate the brand story and historical culture of Champion, and enhance the cultural connotation and sense of value of the brand. By telling the stories and ideas behind the brand, consumers can enhance their sense of identity and belonging to the brand.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

References

- [1] Erdem S, Feng X, Moss J, et al. HanesBrands renewable energy prioritization. Duke University, 2017.
- [2] Zheng R. Dior names Wang Junkai their new brand ambassador in China & more, Jing Daily. 2019. Accessed: 27 July 2024. Available at: <https://jingdaily.com/posts/dior-named-new-brand-ambassador-for-menswear-in-china-and-more>
- [3] Tamilmani K, et al. Multi-channel digital marketing strategy in an emerging economy: the case of Flintobox in India. *Digital and Social Media Marketing: Emerging Applications and Theoretical Development*, 2020, 239-248.
- [4] Chasser AH, & Wolfe JC. *Brand rewired: Connecting branding, creativity, and intellectual property strategy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
- [5] Romaniuk J., et al. Evidence concerning the importance of perceived brand differentiation. *Australasian Marketing Journal (AMJ)*, 2007, 15(2): 42-54.
- [6] Youn C. Anti-Aging of fashion brands with sustained longevity in Korea: A qualitative research on self-diagnosis and treatment of brand aging. *International Journal of Costume and Fashion*, 2019, 19(2): 71-84,.
- [7] Dipen Visavadiya. Nov 22, 2023. Accessed: 27 July 2024. <https://www.ranktracker.com/zh/blog/8-strategies-for-leveraging-user-feedback-to-boost-conversions/>