

How to expand the thermos cup market through network publicity and product positioning

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Abstract. With the steady growth of the global stainless steel thermos cup market, social platform marketing plays a key role in enhancing brand influence and product sales. Through the study of Standly's case, this paper first describes the strategy of making thermos cups into "fashion accessories", and Stanley has achieved remarkable market expansion by increasing the attention of female consumers; Then, the actual effect of this strategy is analyzed, that is, the sales volume of its star product Quencher series has increased greatly. Finally, suggestions on using new technologies and social media marketing are put forward to meet the needs of consumers and enhance brand influence. It is concluded that continuous innovation and optimization of market positioning are the key to maintain the leading position in the competition of vacuum flask industry. Research on marketing strategy is very important for enterprises to succeed in the rapidly changing market. It can not only help enterprises identify market opportunities and optimize resource allocation, but also meet customer needs, enhance brand influence, and ultimately promote the sustainable development and growth of enterprises.

Keywords: Product positioning, female customer segment, brand image.

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of network technology, social platforms are also evolving and iterating. After reviewing previous relevant research, it has been found that as research on social platforms deepens, the understanding of these platforms has gradually shifted from their inherent concepts to focusing on user behavior analysis, information dissemination studies, platform technologies, and case studies of typical social platforms [1, 2]. Through research, it can be observed that social platform marketing not only enhances the publicity of products and companies but also leverages the social attributes of these platforms to strengthen sharing and interaction among consumers.

The global stainless steel insulated container industry has seen stable growth, with Asia, North America, and Europe being the main consumer markets [3, 4]. In 2021, the global insulated container industry market size reached 7.4 billion USD, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.5% from 2017 to 2021, maintaining a steady growth trend. In recent years, the insulated cup market suffered a severe setback due to the impact of the pandemic. However, in 2021, as the pandemic came to an end, the market began to recover, primarily due to the rise of outdoor activities such as camping and hiking, combined with the increasing demand for insulation (and cooling) in scenarios like office, home, and car use.

As global consumption accelerates, it is inevitable that more companies in the industry will begin to focus on brand development and social marketing [5]. Therefore, the insulated cup industry urgently needs to adjust its current brand-building efforts. This paper adopts a case study approach to conduct targeted optimizations of the existing brand development strategies of insulated cups under the current "Internet+" context. The goal is to enhance brand influence, increase market sales of self-branded products, and boost company revenue and profits. This will help the entire industry gradually move towards a healthy development path in the context of economic recovery.

2. Case Research

2.1. Case description

In 2021, the United States held 17.8% of the global stainless steel insulated ware market. In 2023, the global market size for insulated bottles reached \$5.14 billion and is expected to grow from \$5.35 billion in 2024 to \$8.07 billion by 2032, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.26% during the forecast period. Additionally, North America is expected to continue dominating the insulated bottle market, holding a market share of 35.6% in 2023. According to the "Outdoor Recreation Participation Report" released by the Outdoor Foundation and the Outdoor Industry Association, the participation rate in outdoor recreational activities in the U.S. increased from 48% in 2014 to 54% in 2021.

For the U.S. market, which is currently recovering, this presents a significant opportunity for every company [6]. However, given the limited market, companies have begun upgrading their products and increasing their promotions. Every company in a recovering market hopes to capitalize on the market's resurgence, and not just domestic companies in the U.S. are eager to seize the opportunity—foreign insulated cup brands are also attempting to enter the U.S. market [7], such as Yeti. The increasing number of competitors will likely create obstacles in the future market and reduce the market share available to each company. In response, some companies have developed new marketing strategies that differ from the traditional "practicality" approach. Instead, they are following a strategy where "insulated cups = fashion item + high price + endorsement." The pioneer of this approach was S'well, which first introduced high-end insulated cups with celebrity endorsements in the UK in the 21st century [8]. This concept was later emulated by Yeti and Stanley, who also benefited from it. After adopting this concept, Yeti achieved annual sales of over 10 million units for a single product. Stanley's Quencher series, launched in 2019, saw explosive sales growth, doubling or more from 2021 to 2022. However, not all brands that adopted this strategy were successful; many companies tried to emulate S'well's fashion concept but ultimately did not achieve success [9].

The Stanley insulated cup was founded in 1913 by an American named William Stanley Jr., who was also the inventor of the all-steel double-wall vacuum insulated bottle. William Stanley Jr.'s personal resume is quite impressive. As an American physicist, he obtained a total of 129 patents in his lifetime (including the Stanley all-steel vacuum insulated bottle) and was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. The original purpose of creating the Stanley brand was to allow people to enjoy hot drinks (hot coffee) anytime and anywhere. Initially, the Stanley insulated cup was very fragile, meaning that if you accidentally dropped the cup, you would lose not only a cup of coffee but also a high-value insulated cup. This led Stanley to change the type of insulated cups they produced, focusing on both insulation and durability (heat resistance, shatter resistance, and long-lasting durability). For over a century, Stanley's main customer base consisted of workers and outdoor enthusiasts, which is why their marketing consistently portrayed a "tough guy" image. A typical marketing tactic was highlighting how, during World War II, the U.S. military used Stanley insulated cups to transport plasma and human organs, or stories like a Stanley cup surviving a fall from a B-29 aircraft without damage. The essence of marketing is storytelling, and these battlefield stories served as the best brand advertisements. Stanley's image of being sturdy and durable became deeply ingrained in the public's mind, even appearing frequently in American films from the 20th to 21st centuries in scenes involving mines, farms, or camping.

In the previous section, the paper discussed Stanley's original purpose and brand image during its early years. Stanley created a sturdy and durable image that has been maintained for over 100 years, consistently targeting workers and outdoor enthusiasts as their primary customers. However, for these workers and outdoor enthusiasts, the more durable the product they purchase, the less likely they are to need to buy more products. In 2019, Stanley adopted a strategy to expand its business scope, shifting its focus from solely targeting the male market to also appealing to the female demographic. The types of insulated cups also evolved from being primarily outdoor-focused to now including limited-edition colors and co-branded styles. This shift began in 2019 when the founder of a shopping guide discovered that Stanley insulated cups were extremely popular among women, with an

astonishing record of selling 5,000 units within an hour. This realization prompted Stanley to recognize the purchasing power of the female demographic and make changes. Since then, Stanley's products have been designed to cater to the aesthetic preferences of female consumers (limited-edition styles and colors), such as the Quencher series. As a result, Stanley's performance has increased tenfold compared to before the shift, achieving an annual revenue of \$750 million.

By 2024, Stanley has made women their primary target market, largely due to the new CMO, Riley, who joined in 2020. Riley had previously transformed unattractive products into fashion icons at Crocs, which aligned perfectly with Stanley's vision. In 2020, Stanley introduced more colors for the Quencher series and became more focused on appealing to the female market. Their marketing strategy involves promoting these products to women via social media. For example, on TikTok, many collectors share videos of their limited-edition Stanley cups like the Stanley 1913, or footage of people frantically buying Stanley cups at Target. These videos subtly position the Quencher as a symbol of status, similar to a Hermès bag. This has greatly enhanced Stanley's reputation and fashion appeal among women. The turning point for Stanley came in November 2023, during a car accident where the entire vehicle was destroyed by fire, but the Stanley cup inside remained intact, with even the ice cubes not fully melted. This video garnered 80 million views in just four days. The CMO also responded by gifting a batch of cups and a new car to the individual involved, marking a successful transformation for Stanley.

2.2. Case analysis

From the perspective of corporate profits, in the past five years, Stanley has experienced significant profit growth. The following is the analysis:

In 2019, Stanley's annual income is about \$73 million. At that time, Stanley mainly served the traditional outdoor market, and its products were popular among certain groups, such as construction workers, teachers and nurses. In 2020-2021, with the increase of outdoor activities during the epidemic, people pay more attention to the hygiene and portability of personal drinking utensils, and Stanley's income begins to grow rapidly. In 2021, the company's sales increased by 250%, especially in the field of e-commerce. In 2022, Stanley's income continues to climb. Through innovative marketing strategies, such as cooperation with fashion brands and promotion on social media platforms, the company further expanded the audience of its products. Stanley has made its products a "fashion accessory", which is especially popular among young women. In 2023, Stanley's sales are expected to reach \$750 million, a tenfold increase over 2019. This is mainly due to the explosive growth of its star product "Quencher" water cup, which is widely sought after through social media and influencer promotion.

From the perspective of innovative marketing, Stanley successfully used social media marketing and influencer promotion to turn its products into fashion accessories, which enhanced brand value and sales.

(1)Diversified markets: Stanley has expanded from a brand mainly for outdoor enthusiasts to a wider market, especially for female consumers and young people.

(2)Product scarcity strategy: the introduction of limited edition and cooperative funds has created scarcity and urgency, further enhancing consumers' desire to buy and the resale market of products.

(3)Generally speaking, Stanley has achieved remarkable income growth through strong marketing strategy and brand remodeling in the past five years, and its future prospects are promising.

(4)Besides the "fashion item + high price + endorsement" approach, Stanley has also made several changes, such as leveraging online marketing to boost brand awareness, offering limited-edition colors and styles, and creating co-branded products. Data shows a significant increase in Stanley's revenue following November 2023.

3. Suggestion

(1) Integrating New Technologies to Meet Consumer Needs Precisely. New technologies like AI and big data are not yet widely used in community marketing, which still faces efficiency issues in precision marketing. Traditional community marketing should use big data and cloud computing to overcome technological barriers and accurately capture consumer needs. Additionally, technologies such as VR can be employed to create virtual scenarios for scene marketing, which can significantly reduce customer acquisition costs [10].

(2) Establishing a Brand Image. For brand image, it's crucial to highlight the product image and tell the brand story in the consumer market. As insulated cups are consumable items, brand image and product design are key. If the original brand image no longer aligns with current trends, improvements should be made in product functionality, appearance, and style. New designs should attract consumers' attention and encourage them to try the products.

(3) Optimizing Market Positioning. The company needs to reidentify target users and clarify the target market. Market positioning is closely linked to product image, and optimizing the product image based on the current market positioning is essential for brand upgrading. According to the DPM brand positioning model, the ultimate goal of brand positioning is to occupy a favorable position in consumers' minds. Brand positioning can be dynamically adjusted and further refined.

4. Summary

This study reveals that as the global consumer market evolves and technology advances, the insulated cup industry is continuously adapting to meet new market demands. Successful cases such as Stanley demonstrate that brand image development and innovative marketing strategies are crucial for enhancing market competitiveness. By achieving precise market positioning, leveraging new technologies for targeted marketing, and continually optimizing brand image, companies can distinguish themselves in a competitive market. Looking ahead, the insulated cup industry should remain attentive to shifts in consumer needs, particularly regarding the application of social media and emerging technologies, to maintain a competitive edge in a dynamic market environment. Through ongoing innovation and optimization, insulated cup companies can not only enhance their brand influence and market share but also drive the industry towards a more positive developmental trajectory. In summary, only by consistently monitoring market trends and flexibly responding to challenges can companies achieve sustainable growth and ensure their leading position in the global market.

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