

Analysis of Shanghai Disney Theme Park's Marketing Strategies for Female Groups in China

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ABSTRACT

Ranking fourth on Fortune's 2020 list of the world's most admired companies, the Walt Disney Company has enduring management approaches and marketing strategies. Among all kinds of marketing strategies applied by Disney, this paper puts the focus on the female groups which are the primary consumers of Disney theme parks in China. By reviewing published articles and studies, this paper examines the marketing approaches used by Shanghai Disneyland from the angle of experience marketing and media marketing. Finally, this paper finds that these strategies are well applied in different situations of marketing on female groups, especially women born in 1990s. As female group is the prime target consumers with great consumption potential, Disney should convey positive values and ideas while marketing. At the same time, these cases also provide references for other commercial marketing strategies and the positioning of target consumer groups.

Keywords: Disney, Marketing strategies, Females.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Walt Disney Company was founded in 1923, which is one of the most successful media and entertainment companies in the world. When it was initially established, its main business was animation production. Winning a number of Oscar awards of animated films, it laid a solid foundation for its popularity and crucial position in film and television industry. With gradual development, Disney has expanded its business in all directions. Since 1955, Disney has established six theme parks around the world which two of them are located in China (Shanghai and Hong Kong). Shanghai Disney Resort was opened in 2016, and according to Disney's second quarter 2017 financial report, it received more than 11 million visitors in its first year of operation [1]. According to *2021 China Theme Park Competitiveness Evaluation Report*, under the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, while the operating income of 64 theme parks in China decreased by 49.87% during year 2020, Shanghai Disneyland still ranked first in comprehensive evaluation [2].

Thus, many researches and studies have aimed to analyze Disney's marketing strategies for its

theme parks. Most of the relevant articles start with the overall marketing methods, dividing the approaches into multiple categories; or comparing the differences in the marketing strategies of theme parks with other brands. However, few studies put the focus on the perspective of the female group. According to a previous research conducted by Kangli Qu, "in terms of gender, the females had a higher evaluation of entertainment and aesthetic experience, satisfaction and revisit intention than males", showing that the female group is the main target consumers of Disneyland [3].

In addition, the female protagonists portrayed in Disney films have become more independent, egalitarian and been empowered in stages corresponding to the awakening of female consciousness and the development of feminism in society. This paper will first analyze experience marketing strategies and media marketing strategies applied by Disney, then illustrate some specific Disney's marketing cases for female groups in China and how these approaches are combined with experience marketing ideas and female consumer psychology to provide guidance for females to raise their consciousness and rationality. Also, not only female groups are proved to the primary consumer

group with huge consumption potential, but also these real cases could provide a reference for other commercial marketing ideas and the positioning of target consumer groups.

2. GENERAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

2.1 Experience Marketing

Among all kinds of marketing strategies, experience marketing strategies play a significant role in influencing customers behaviors and brand development. Generally, experience is referred to the interaction between a company(service/brand/product) and a customer [4]. According to theory released by Hekkert there are three levels of experience, which are attribution of meaning, emotional response and aesthetic pleasure. During the stage of experience of meaning, cognition involved into the whole procedure, all these three levels of experience would further influence value co-creation, purchase decisions of consumers and consumers' behavior. What is more, Schmitt presented five types of experience marketing approaches which have been widely accepted by public. "Sense", "feel", "think", "act" and "relate" are referred to as "strategic experiential modules" [5]. Meanwhile, customers would gain sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational values. According to Same and Larimo, they came up with a conceptual model of experience marketing, which could also apply in the context of Shanghai Disney Resort. ("Figure 1")

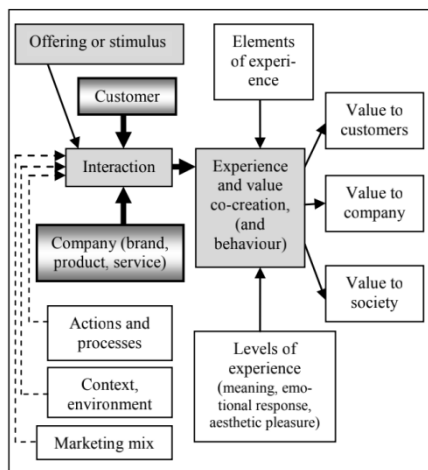


Figure 1 Conceptual model of experience marketing [4].

2.1.1 Sense Marketing

Sense marketing targets on consumers' sight, sound touch, taste and smell experience. In terms of the design of the theme park environment and architectures, Disney has perfectly restored scenes from its cartoon movies, creating a beautiful fairy tale world. The background music played in the park also makes the atmosphere of the park more natural and deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. When customers take a visit, they would be immersed in an atmosphere of happiness and joy. The visual and auditory impact is not only applied to the landscape design of the theme park, but also fully displayed in various rides. Aided by high technology, rides in Shanghai Disneyland offers visitors more realistic and thrilling experience. For instance, one ride in Shanghai Disneyland named *Soaring Over the Horizon*, which utilizes the giant-screen projection technology and innovates on the basis of the ride in the United States. What is more, another attraction called *Pirates of the Caribbean Battle for the Sunken Treasure* uses post-production special effects, robotics, giant dome and other technologies, combined with realistic and grand indoor landscaping [6]. It also greatly integrates technology techniques, makes consumers harvest an indelible memory and experience.

2.1.2 Feel Marketing

The word "Feel" refers to inner feelings and emotions of consumers. One typical example is the high quality of Disney's staff service. There are four key standards Disney set for itself which contribute to great customer experience. "SCSE" stands for safety, courtesy, show and efficiency [7]. Adhering to this philosophy and standard, staffs in Shanghai Disneyland would always show their enthusiasm, politeness and considerate mind. Through the "SCSE" basic code of conduct, Disneyland has given employees the right and responsibility to make independent judgments and take actions, thus making Disneyland's services more humanized [8]. This will make visitors feel warm as if they are coming home, which evokes their inner emotions of satisfaction.

Apart from this, the peripheral products sold in Disneyland souvenir stores also skillfully exploit the inner emotions of consumers. Many of Disney's new series of dolls need to be pre-ordered online and then purchased offline at Shanghai Disney resort. Moreover, these peripheral products are limited and only a certain amount would be

available in market, that is, the use of hunger marketing. In addition to the brand effect, which Disney has relied on its own brand to gain popularity, hunger marketing strategy also increase consumers' perceived value. Thus, when consumers successfully purchase it, they will have a more prominent sense of satisfaction. This psychology and inner feelings guarantee the validity of hunger marketing.

2.1.3 *Think Marketing*

Think marketing puts the emphasis on the intellect which delivers cognitive, problem-solving experience to consumers. Children are one of the primary consumer groups of Disney theme parks, Disney holds events and games in order to cultivate children's independent thinking ability. Furthermore, after an activity called "Disney Princess Dream World" was held by Hong Kong Disneyland, teenage girls could log on to the website and learn about manners and etiquette of princesses.

2.1.4 *Act Marketing*

Act marketing aims on consumers' physical behavior and lifestyles through interactions. At the end of year 2021, Shanghai Disney Resort's WeChat Official Account announced that it will provide a new service project that couples could take wedding photos at Disneyland. Dreamy and beautiful castles and fairy tale-like decoration style make the theme park a perfect shooting location. Besides, Disney has always passed on to the public a kind of pure happiness and constant anticipation for innocence. Thus, taking wedding photos at Disneyland would strengthen romance and purity of their relationship.

Furthermore, Shanghai Disney Resort also announced that its restaurant now could be reserved for company annual meeting. This is not only an effective and innovative tactic to expand its business scope, but also creates more opportunities for itself to interact with people with different identities and purpose of arrival.

During Chinese traditional festivals or special timing, Shanghai Disneyland would also hold characteristic events to draw consumers' attention. For example, when Chinese Spring Festival approached, Shanghai Disneyland held a calligraphy activity which visitors could write Chinese character on red paper to bring good fortune to the upcoming new year. This tradition event made more visitors successfully engaged in

new year celebration, which this interaction would make consumers receive a more memorable experience.

2.1.5 *Affiliate Marketing*

Affiliate marketing creates experience by taking into account individuals' desires to be part of a social context [5]. In other words, it means to make one's personal experience relates to ideal self, others or culture he/she belongs in. Affiliate marketing in not parallel to any of the above category, but actually consists all of them and randomly combines them in various situations. On the basis of Disney's international operation, Disney has fully considered the influence of regional culture. For example, the Shanghai Disney theme park has inserted a variety of Chinese elements into its theme setting. As Chinese Zodiac is one famous traditional culture, Shanghai Disneyland once related its cartoon character "Mickey Mouse" to the mouse which sequences the first on the Chinese Zodiac list. So, Shanghai Disneyland also launched a series of souvenirs and toys around the theme of the "Chinese Year of the Mouse". Relevant data shows that among the interviewed Shanghai Disney tourists, 90.42% people felt Chinese culture, and 92.96% of the tourists believed that Shanghai Disney had promoted the improvement of local cultural quality [9]. With this relation, the theme of Shanghai Disneyland would blend in the cultural context more easily, which would also attract more consumers to pay a visit.

2.2 *Media Marketing*

As mobile phones and computers have become more and more popular, the dissemination and influence of information on the Internet gradually make the mass media one of the means of marketing. Shanghai Disneyland has also greatly applied media marketing strategies since it was officially opened on June 16, 2016. During that day, Shanghai Disneyland invited celebrities and internet influencers to have a live video streaming. Lang Lang, the notable Chinese pianist, was invited to the opening ceremony and broadcasted the whole scene of his birthday at Disneyland, with hundreds of thousands of viewers [1]. Therefore, apart from the celebrity effect, this media platform also helped to draw public attention to Shanghai Disney Resort.

Moreover, the app Weibo has been widely used by Chinese users, which its function and positioning is similar to Instagram and Facebook.

As many internet influencers who has hundreds of thousands of fans frequently posted and shared about Shanghai Disneyland, they in fact contributed to the popularity of Shanghai Disneyland.

When it comes to this topic, it is impossible not to mention the existence of WeChat. According to a statistic, in 2016, 768 million users logged on to WeChat every day, accounting for about 61% of the country's resident population and half of the 700 million people use WeChat for more than 90 minutes a day [1]. So when Shanghai Disneyland was opened and set up its own WeChat official account to advertise for its upcoming events, it would make people instantaneously obtain the information and browse it at any moment. Shanghai Disneyland WeChat official account not only facilitates marketing effects, but also offers convenience and immediacy. Since then, articles and announcement would be routinely posted on the WeChat Official Account, and some merchandise purchases also require advance reservations online.

In recent years, a variety of media platforms have deeply rooted in people's lives. Shanghai Disney theme park also combines its marketing strategies with the use of mass media, such as TIKTOK, Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu), Weibo and so on. No matter what specific marketing strategy is utilized, the media as a fundamental component is becoming an inevitable trend.

3. MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR FEMALE GROUPS IN CHINA

Women as the main target consumers of Disney theme parks, this section will place the focus on this point and briefly analyze a few independent cases to demonstrate how Shanghai Disneyland has exerted marketing approaches on Chinese female group.

3.1 LinaBell

LinaBell is a new IP character first appeared in Shanghai Disneyland on September 29, 2021. Unlike previous characters, LinaBell is not from any Disney's cartoon films. In the theme park, she shows her enthusiasm and friendly attitude with visitors by hugging, blowing kisses and shaking hands with them. What's more, LinaBell would hold umbrellas for the audience on rainy days. These interactions between LinaBell and visitors quickly made LinaBell become famous and people

all adored her, which embodies the act marketing strategy.

LinaBell's lovely pink appearance is loved by young women which is also the target consumer group of Disney. After LinaBell was officially introduced by Shanghai Disney, many popular female celebrities have posted photos of themselves and LinaBell on social platforms. Since the majority users of The Little Red Book and Weibo are females, this phenomenon precisely set off the trend of young women pursuing LinaBell. Relevant data reveals that, among the people who follow LinaBell, the most active ones are born in 1990s, and more than 70% of them are women.

Shanghai Disney not only focused on social media marketing, but also leveraged Hunger Marketing strategy to promote LinaBell's perceived value. When the collection of plush toys which contains LinaBell were presented, the only official way to purchase it is by booking online and then redeeming at Shanghai Disneyland offline store. Since the number of sales was limited, resulting in many people queuing up at Shanghai Disneyland to buy dolls in the early morning. Due to a news report, at 3:20 am on December 29, 2021, Shanghai Disneyland's momentary consumer flow amount was 5,855 people [10]. This confirms the success of LinaBell's marketing strategy for women.

3.2 International Women's Day Theme Activities

On March 8, 2021, which was the International Women's Day, Shanghai Disneyland has launched themed events to celebrate this festival. In Chinese, Disney is translated into "迪士尼" and Shanghai Disneyland changed the Chinese character "尼" into "妮" which the latter one has the radical stands for female. Not only all women who visited the theme park would be treated like a princess, but also Shanghai Disneyland's propaganda slogan was "Every girl could be their own princess, Disneyland is their home. Welcome home!" Taking pictures with different female Disney characters and gorgeous princesses and watching the romantic and dreamy fireworks light show at night, female visitors would definitely gain a distinctive and unforgettable experience. Besides, there was a discount on the ticket price, which would become more appealing to consumers.

Under the social trend of feminism, female characters portrayed by Disney have become more independent, bold and smart. This empowerment of

women indicates awakening of feminine consciousness and weakening of female stereotypes. Shanghai Disneyland also conforms to such values with such practical actions.

3.3 *The Celebrity Effect*

In the entertainment industry, the popularity and economic benefits brought by a celebrity are immeasurable. Shanghai Disneyland takes advantage of the fan base and social influence that celebrities have as a marketing method. One article sent by Shanghai Disneyland WeChat Official Account was about Xian Li, a well-known male celebrity, visited Shanghai Disneyland and interacted with Donald Duck on stage. After starring in a love drama, Li Xian gained a large number of female fans as the male protagonist. So obviously, one of the intentions of inviting Xian Li to Shanghai Disney Resort was to get the attention of young females. As expected, many young ladies commented under the article that how much they envied Donald Duck and wished they could encounter Xian Li in Shanghai Disneyland once in a life time.

Another case which also reflects the celebrity effect would be Dilraba Dilmurat and Yang Yang visited Shanghai Disney Resort and group photos of them in various scenes in the theme park were posted on the WeChat Official Account. They are all the most popular celebrities and collaborated on a love TV series called *You are My Glory*. Since the drama aired, the ratings have remained high which gained a large amount of loyal fans. Because the plot is so sweet and beautiful, fans named them as "the Glory Couple". Since most of the fans of this TV drama are young females, inviting Dilraba Dilmurat and Yang Yang to Shanghai Disneyland would make them produce more love and romance fantasies about Disneyland. Hence, these females would be more likely to go to Shanghai Disneyland and imitate their idols and fond couples to possess a relate experience. By relating their own experience with those celebrities, once again, the strategy of experiential marketing is used flexibly by Shanghai Disney.

3.4 *"Princess Power"*

In 2021, Disney released a short film themed "What is Princess Power". In the video, four women were interviewed with the question: what is princess power to you, female explorer Jiaojiao Hu believed that instead of waiting for others to save

those princesses, princess power is love and responsibility; female writer Jinnian Qi said that princess power is finding fulfillment between heaven and earth, seeing ourselves and seeing the universe; musical theatre actress Zhenying Ding claimed that princess power is having control of their own destinies; as for actress Yanshu Wu who is already 83 years old, she deemed that princess power is the ability to influence the whole society. Thus, from the short film, people could see various possibilities on females, and it also conveys the idea of women power and feminism.

Under this circumstance, Shanghai Disney took its own action. It initiated an event to find girls who possess princess power in our real life. Females in all ages could share their stories at the comment section below the article, which Shanghai Disney staffs would select five outstanding "princess power deeds" and invite them to join "the Super girl Coronation Ceremony" in the Castle banquet hall with a free ticket. This event allowed every girl to have a chance to engage in it and harvest a sense of experience. These true stories of "princess power" not only brought the image of princess closer to reality, but also allowed the public to appreciate the grace and energy of women. There is no exact concept of princess power, it is actually defined by every woman and girl. Upholding this idea, it is not only a perfect marketing strategy for Shanghai Disneyland, but also delivers positive values of females to the whole society.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper first analyzes the concept and multiple types of experience marketing and how it is applied by Shanghai Disneyland with the assistance of media marketing strategies. Then this paper switches the focus to female groups in China who are the primary target consumers of Disney. The design of LinaBell perfectly caters to the aesthetics of young women, coupled with the effect of hunger marketing and media marketing, LinaBell has become a representative of fashion. The innovation Shanghai Disneyland made during the International Women's Day embodies feminism, which the discount of tickets on that date also made the whole event more appealing. Moreover, the celebrity effect is one of the common marketing strategies used by Shanghai Disney, which by inviting celebrities to Disney theme park, not only it draws the attention of female fans, but also the brand image of Disneyland would become more glamorous and fascinating. "the Princess power" is

a undefined concept created by Disney, after the short film themed "what is princess power", Shanghai Disneyland held an event to find girls with "princess power" online and invited them to join "the Super girl Coronation Ceremony". These true stories of "princess power" not only brought the image of princess closer to reality, but also provided a chance to all females to engage in it. Through briefly analyzing above cases of Shanghai Disney Resort, marketing strategies for female group are valid. However, Shanghai Disneyland should not only concentrate on the effectiveness and economic profits, but convey positive values to the female group and society with its brand influence. Eventually, female groups are the primary consumer group with huge consumption potential, which these real cases could provide a practical reference for other business marketing strategies and the positioning of target consumer groups. Since experience marketing closely links to consumer behavior, further studies could be conducted from the perspective of Behavior Economics.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Shuyun Lyu.

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