

# Research on the Marketing Strategy of Domestic Sports Brands under the Patriotic Upsurge —— Taking Anta as an Example

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**Abstract.** Some special events in the past two years have made the patriotic enthusiasm of the Chinese people unprecedentedly high, which has provided a valuable opportunity for the development of domestic sports brands. Under such circumstances, Anta took advantage of the heat of these events and the people's enthusiasm to carry out successful marketing campaigns. This paper mainly uses survey, interview, and literature research in terms of methods. The study found that many domestic sports brands have developed under the patriotic upsurge, and patriotic sentiment greatly impacts consumer behavior. Anta's marketing strategies during this period, like launching China-Chic products, signing star spokespeople and sponsoring sports events, have helped it optimize its brand image. However, there are also some problems, such as decision-making deviation, which leads to some categories entering the market late. Studying Anta's marketing strategies under the patriotic upsurge can make Anta more clearly aware of its strengths and weaknesses and provide confidence and reference for other domestic brands. In addition, it is also worth thinking about how domestic sports brands will continue to develop after the enthusiasm fades and consumers return to rationality.

**Keywords:** Patriotic Upsurge, China, Sports Brands, Marketing Strategy.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

Anta is a comprehensive, multi-brand sporting goods group established in 1991 in Jinjiang City, Fujian Province, China. Over the years, it has always regarded "Keep Moving" as the core value of the enterprise and has continuously updated and improved its brand strategy in the process of development. It has become the first Chinese sports brand by market value.

Since 2018, the rise of China-Chic and the rising patriotic enthusiasm of the Chinese have given domestic sports brands unprecedented opportunities. "Baidu 2021 China-Chic Pride Search Big Data" shows that the attention to China-Chic has increased by 528% in the past ten years. In 2021, the attention rate of domestic brands had reached three times that of foreign brands; domestic clothing is the second-fastest-growing category in attention rate [1].

At the beginning of 2018, the Chinese sports brand Li Ning appeared on the New York Fashion Week show, causing an uproar in the Chinese fashion industry. This is also the first signal China issued to the international trend community: We are here, although it is a bit late. Since March 2020, China's epidemic control has become a world benchmark. This creates conditions for people to go out to exercise and enhances the national pride in people's hearts. In addition, domestic brands have performed well in the Xinjiang cotton incident in March 2021 and the Henan flood in July. Anta expressed its support for Xinjiang Cotton and donated 50 million yuan to the disaster-stricken areas. The people have seen its sincere patriotism and sense of responsibility and rewarded it with praise and consumption. During the double 11, Anta Group's total e-commerce turnover exceeded 4.65 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 61% [2]. Since the second half of 2021, high-density and high-level sports events have been launched, greatly stimulating people's enthusiasm for sports. In particular, Chinese elements can be seen everywhere in the Beijing Winter Olympics, demonstrating the hospitality and cultural confidence of the host. According to JD.com consumption data, affected

by the popularity of the Winter Olympics opening ceremony, From 8 p.m. on February 4 to 11 a.m. on February 5, Beijing time, the turnover of Anta down jackets increased by 203% year-on-year [3].

Huatai Securities analyzed that local Chinese brands have advantages; in the medium and long term, domestic sports brands that can compete with Nike and Adidas are expected to be cultivated, and Anta has great potential [4].

However, the domestic goods economy is not just a sentimental or a patriotic economy, and Anta's future goals are not limited to the Chinese market. After the heat of each event has passed, Anta should still think about how to develop new marketing strategies, launch new campaigns, and constantly explore the connotation and cultural value of the brand, so that the public at home and abroad can truly feel its charm.

## 1.2 Literature review

According to Wang, as "national fitness" and "lifelong fitness" have gradually become the basic consensus of social groups, the sports manufacturing industry has ushered in an opportunity for vigorous development. Under the siege of international brands such as Nike and Adidas, if Anta wants to maintain its existing market position, it must continuously optimize its development strategy, seek innovation breakthroughs, and seek individuality development [5]. However, the author believes that Anta's goal is not to maintain its current market position but to improve.

Han analyzed that the Chinese sports market has ushered in a golden development period. The support of domestic consumers is the biggest guarantee for the growth of domestic brand sales. However, this does not mean that they can have a safe future. Domestic sports brands must face up to their problems. The domestic masses have trusted domestic brands and hope that domestic brands can return enough sincerity to them [6].

Zhang believes that in terms of building and maintaining brand power and image, domestic sports brands still have a certain distance from international first-line brands. They may face some long-term challenges, such as grasping the internal relationship between the brand and the consumer group, releasing the brand value to maintain the continuity of growth, and solving the hidden worries under the current model [7].

## 1.3 Research gap

Most of the papers have researched Anta from its long-term, comprehensive upper-level strategy, such as analyzing its "multi-brand, single-focus, omnichannel" development strategy. Due to the timeliness of some events, such as the Beijing Winter Olympics just held in February 2022, there is no paper to analyze Anta's marketing strategies in combination with them. These events have inspired the Chinese people's patriotic enthusiasm and cultural identity. Anta has taken many marketing measures in such a big environment, which has received good responses. In addition, this paper will also present some critical points of view about Anta's marketing strategy that previous researchers have not raised.

## 1.4 Research framework

This article first introduces the background of the times when the national patriotic enthusiasm has been rising in recent years. Secondly, it analyzes the development status of domestic sports brands and the behavioral characteristics of consumers under the patriotic upsurge. Thirdly, from the perspective of The Marketing Theory of 4Ps, it analyzes the marketing measures taken by Anta in combination with specific events. Finally, it puts forward some optimization and improvement suggestions for the existing problems of Anta's marketing strategy and its future development.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Survey method

The investigation and research method refers to obtaining relevant materials directly through investigation, understanding the objective situation, and analyzing these materials. This paper uses the questionnaire survey method, taking the young consumer groups aged 18-30 as the main object, and investigates the changes in their attitudes towards domestic brands and products in the past two years and the changes in their considerations when purchasing sportswear. This paper can obtain a more specific and accurate consumer perception of Anta's marketing strategy. To make the results clearer, specific options are set for each question. For example, for the question "Will you buy Anta products because of the endorsement of the sports star Eileen Feng Gu", there will be three answers "Yes", "No" and "Not sure" to choose from. The final data can prove whether Anta's recent marketing strategy has a sufficiently positive impact on building brand image and improving brand reputation.

### 2.2 Interview method

The interview method is used in this paper. Their specific consumption motivations can be obtained by interviewing some consumers who have recently purchased Anta products. Also, more in-depth information can be captured, such as their expectations and suggestions for Anta or other domestic brands. Some consumers who have not purchased Anta products will also be interviewed, and they will be asked to explain their reasons for choosing other brands over Anta. This will even provide more valuable information for this paper, allowing it to make more practical suggestions for Anta's future development. Anta can expand its market by meeting the unmet needs of these consumers and having a larger consumer group.

### 2.3 Literature research method

The literature research method mainly refers to collecting, identifying, and arranging literature and forming a scientific understanding of the facts through the study of literature. This paper will collect secondary data through literature research, hoping to provide strong support for the views of this paper with official data and professional opinions. More than 10 pieces of literature are referenced and cited herein, including but not limited to journals, industry reports, and newspaper articles. For example, according to the Jingdong e-commerce platform statistics, Anta's official flagship store sales increased during the Winter Olympics, proving that Anta seized the opportunity to launch a successful marketing campaign. Besides, according to Anta's future marketing strategy elaboration by its senior managers, some important aspects they have ignored can be used as suggestions for Anta in this paper.

In short, in order to more accurately analyze Anta's marketing strategy and provide stronger proof for the point of view, both primary and secondary information will be used in this article.

## 3. Result

### 3.1 The development of domestic sports brands under the patriotic upsurge

The secondary market responded strongly after the Xinjiang cotton incident on March 24, 2021. Shares of domestic brands such as Anta rose sharply after announcing their withdrawal from the CBI and their support for Xinjiang Cotton. On March 25, Anta's share price rose from 116 yuan to 120 yuan. The financial report shows that Anta's revenue in the first half of the year reached 22.8 billion yuan, surpassing Adidas' 18.298 billion yuan in the Chinese market. The domestic sports market is no longer dominated by Nike and Adidas but has formed a pattern of one super (Nike) and many strong (Adi, Anta, Li Ning, etc.) [6]. In July of the same year, Zhengzhou, Henan, experienced continuous heavy rainfall and suffered severe floods. Many national enterprises, including domestic

sports brands such as Anta, have generously donated money. This makes the people feel the responsibility of these domestic brands once again.

In addition to the external environment, domestic brands are also trying to make changes. Jiang believes that in economic globalization, the development trend of “localization, personalization, and culturalization” of sports brands are becoming more and more obvious [8]. Domestic products were often regarded as “farthest from the trend and closest to plagiarism” in the earliest days. Since 2015, more and more enterprises have begun to change their thinking and intend to eliminate the label of “Nike apprentice”. They try to optimize the product design and focus on the layout of the China-Chic track so that the market can see another possibility for Chinese brands [9]. They have also developed unique technologies and applied them to products like Li Ning’s flick technology and Anta’s wormhole technology. This enhances consumers’ confidence in domestic brands and enhances the brands’ strength.

The epidemic since 2020 has stimulated the development of e-commerce. Domestic brands have seized this momentum, actively used new channels to reduce costs, expand the market and provide consumers with a more special brand experience. Anta’s marketing promotion has used metaverse and other emerging means mainly aimed at young consumer groups.

The time comes for the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022. This world-class event attracts the attention of people from all over the world, and it is also a good opportunity for marketing exposure for brands. Thus, domestic sports brands rushed to take the “traffic express” to launch marketing battles. However, “The traffic of the Winter Olympics is just an entrance. If the brand wants to keep its popularity for a long time, it must work hard on the product content.” Lu considers that the core of marketing is inseparable from unique, rich, and interesting products and content. To attract and convert more traffic, the focus should be on the product itself [3].

### **3.2 Characteristics of young Chinese consumers’ behavior under the patriotic upsurge**

During the two sessions held in Beijing in March 2022, several representatives pointed out that the rise of domestic brands reflects changes in consumer demand and emotional appeal, and it is also a manifestation of cultural self-confidence. Huang found that more and more college students are no longer obsessed with international brands and have begun to actively embrace domestic brands and become a key force in the growth of the consumer market [10]. According to Zheng Yexin, general manager of 361° brand business management center, the blowout in the domestic market is due to the more confident generation Z. “The attitude of this generation towards domestic goods has gradually changed from exclusion to appreciation.” He said, “Especially after the Xinjiang cotton incident, some domestic brands that support Xinjiang cotton have lost overseas orders, but have been widely favored by domestic consumers [9].” The “2021 China Brand Development Report” shows that the consumption of domestic products of the post-00s generation has the fastest growth rate, exceeding 50%; the per capita consumption of domestic products of the post-90s generation has exceeded 6,000 yuan [10].

According to the questionnaire results, 92% of the respondents have increased their preference for domestic sports brands; 77% have purchased products from domestic sports brands since 2021. Some respondents said frankly that although Anta and other domestic sports brands have gained popularity and favor among Chinese people with the help of a series of events, it might be a difficult process to transform this psychological identity into consumer behavior. They want to support domestic products, but it is sometimes hard to choose one completely satisfactory to themselves.

### **3.3 Marketing Strategy and Existing Problems of Anta**

Since 2018, China-Chic has gradually become popular in China. Anta’s most frequently used marketing strategies have been continuously launching new products in China-Chic style. In May 2019, Anta co-branded with the Forbidden City on the 1,000-day countdown to the Beijing Winter Olympics to create a special edition of the Forbidden City’s licensed products for the Winter Olympics. Combining classic colors and elements of the Forbidden City with Anta’s loafers, the

collection is a typical example of the fusion of tradition and trend. In June 2020, Anta released a new “Li Bai” series of running shoes. The series takes the character of the famous Chinese poet Li Bai as the core and injects the “Real” spirit into the products to resonate with young consumers who pursue individuality and freedom.

This research focuses more on analyzing how Anta conducts marketing around the Winter Olympics from the perspective of 4Ps. One of the reasons behind the attention of the Olympic Games is the rising patriotism of the people [11]. Anta’s Winter Olympics marketing has two main modes: The first is that Anta has an official partnership status. This has higher requirements on the advertising budget of the enterprise and requires a long-term layout, which has higher requirements on the strength of the enterprise; second, Anta signs contracts with sports teams/athletes. As the most popular figures during the Olympic Games, athletes are easily sought after by the public because of their high-quality images and the aura of winning glory for the country.

As the official partner of this Winter Olympics, Anta has sponsored and supported 12 Chinese national ice and snow teams in 15 major Winter Olympics events. From the competition suit to the award suit, Anta appeared in all relevant shots. Super-strength product placement has expanded product exposure, and the influence of athletes has also enhanced the audience’s recognition of Anta’s products.

In the online promotion, Anta placed advertisements containing the slogan “Love sports, China has Anta” on the CCTV sports channel and many social media platforms and broadcasted them continuously. This enhances the audience’s brand awareness, helps build Anta’s professional sports brand image, and drives the enthusiasm of all consumers to love sports. In addition, Anta exclusively named Tencent’s Winter Olympics special program Win against ice and snow launched the digital concept “Ice and Snow Spirit Realm,” and released digital collections. Anta launched the #ANTA Metaverse No.0 Player# theme challenge on Douyin, inviting users to create content together. It attracts 663,000 participants and 1.64 billion views.

In terms of offline promotion, from July 2021, Anta Champion Experience Stores have appeared in Beijing, Qingdao, and Chengdu one after another. The Olympic theme space comprehensively and multi-dimensionally displays the history and stories of the Olympics. Through a series of interactive installations, consumers are allowed to experience the Olympic atmosphere. In January 2022, Beijing APM joined hands with Anta to create an “ice and snow spirit” experience space in the shopping mall, allowing consumers to get close to ice and snow sports.

The national flag model has a prominent selling point in terms of products. As a Winter Olympics licensed product, Anta’s national flag sportswear is also the first “flag sportswear” sold to the public in the history of the Olympic Games. Specifically, with the help of unique logos and new designs, national flag-style products help Anta form its unique brand characteristics. As a clothing sub-industry with a high market concentration, the sportswear industry has its brand advantages and fierce competition. The launch of the national flag model will effectively motivate other leading companies in the sportswear industry to strengthen product differentiation and enhance their advantages.

In terms of marketing rejuvenation, in April 2021, Anta signed top Chinese idol Wang Yibo as its global chief spokesperson and asked him to promote the national flag. The national flag model successfully broke through the circle with the strong influence of top traffic stars among Gen Z consumers. The post-95 generation Z generation has now become the main force of consumption. Holding hands with top traffic stars can further promote the rejuvenation of domestic sports brands while enhancing the brand’s popularity and influence among Generation Z.

Anta has formed a professional team in commodity technology, integrated global resources, and created more advanced competition equipment for the national team. Compared with other brands, sportswear brands have higher requirements for technology content. Anta invests heavily in research and development. Technology empowers mass commodities, which is expected to catalyze the industry to increase investment in research and development, and deeply practice the concept of “professionalism and innovation-driven”.

Anta implements a “multi-brand” development strategy. From 2009 to 2019, it successfully acquired the trademark use rights and management rights of Fila, Descente, Kolon, Amer, and other brands in China, forming a brand matrix covering professional sports, fashion sports, and outdoor sports [12]. Nonetheless, skateboarding, which is increasingly popular among China’s Gen Z group, was not included in the territory of Anta’s main brand product development until 2021.

The first group of skateboarding players appeared in China in the early 1990s, influenced by the movie *Gleaming the Cube*. In August 2016, the IOC plenary session voted that skateboarding should become an Olympic event. In the summer of 2019, the first domestic skateboard variety shows, *One More Try*, was launched, setting off a skateboarding boom among young people in China. According to a survey conducted by Zheng Minglian, general manager of Anta’s Life Category Division, in 2021, about 20 million people in China like skateboarding and its related culture.

It can be said that the gradual popularity of skateboarding in China has long been traced. However, domestic sports brands did not make decisions as early as possible, and consumers did not have the opportunity to buy domestic skateboard shoes and other equipment. According to questionnaires and interviews, more than 80% of the respondents immediately think of Nike SB and Vans when it comes to “skate shoes”, and only slightly more than 10% know that Anta launched its first skate shoe in January 2022. “I’m quite positive because I see the strong cultural influence of skateboarding among young people. The culture that has grown out of the sport has become part of the lifestyle of today’s Chinese Gen Z group. If the market is not big, then make it bigger. Now we’re going to give it a shot.” Zheng said.

#### 4. Discussion

The heat of special events to domestic brands will eventually fade, and consumers’ passionate psychology and impulsive behavior will gradually return to rationality. According to Zhang, the core driving force for the sustainable growth of sports brands is products and brands [12]. In addition, it is also crucial to intuitively present their strength to generation Z, their main consumer group, and attract them.

Generation Z in China is a more confident generation. Cultural confidence and national identity have been deeply rooted in their hearts. As they become a new force in consumption, domestic brands have ushered in new opportunities for rapid growth. Generation Z pays attention to personality and identity. They have strong consumption will and more detailed demand, which puts forward higher requirements for domestic brands. Anta needs to make efforts from the aspects of traditional culture, independent innovation ability, multi-channel precision marketing, and “going global” to grasp young consumers while strengthening the main brand firmly.

First, “national is the world” is the criterion for the success of domestic brands. Anta should continue to combine traditional culture with the fashion style young consumers prefer in the next development. And It can create a brand image containing Chinese power and bearing Chinese fashion and show the young people’s hard-working and positive spirit to enhance consumers’ brand identity. Huang suggested that domestic brands can apply a large number of cultural elements. Especially the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, Suzhou embroidery, paper cutting, ink splashing, cirrus moire, blue and white porcelain, and the trademarks, appearance designs, and packaging of modern products, highlighting the trademarks, appearance designs, and packaging of the local design characteristics of domestic products [13]. This advice also applies to Anta.

Second, it is essential to strengthening independent innovation. With the strengthening of mass fitness awareness and the improvement of consumption levels, mass sports are also developing in the direction of specialization. The demand for overall equipment is growing, the categories are more subdivided and diversified, and consumers’ choices are becoming richer [14]. Previously, consumers may use a pair of sneakers to deal with a variety of sports scenes; But now, they will choose different equipment to deal with different sports scenes. This requires domestic sports brands to increase independent innovation and have the ability to design and produce all kinds of professional sports

equipment. Anta has achieved full category coverage by acquiring other sports brands and building a multi-brand matrix. However, in order to take a more stable development path in the future, its main brand still needs to master its core technology and set higher standards in terms of concept, material, process, and quality. In addition, Anta should also improve product accuracy and strive to develop high-end consumer market products with the help of modern information technologies such as the digital economy, the Internet, and information technology.

Third, cross-border co-branding, event marketing, metaverse, and other new means provide important channel support and promotion support for the sales of domestic brands. Anta should use the opportunities brought by the dividend of Internet traffic, accurately connect young consumer groups' unique trendy consumption attributes with domestic products, and create the unique style and recognition of domestic products to cultivate fixed consumer groups. In addition, offline channels can also make innovations. Anta can implement the first store policy of commercial brands, support brands to open first stores, innovation stores, flagship stores, etc., and provide consumers with a more diversified product experience.

The sports market has high requirements for professionalism and functionality, which is why only a few head brands control this market. "Overall, domestic sports brands have advantages in channels, but there is still a gap with international first-line brands in product R&D. Domestic brands are relatively weak in medium and high-grade equipment. They are struggling to catch up, but they still need to shift from focusing on promotion and channels to increasing product investment." Cheng said [12]. Anta must weigh the importance of all aspects of the 4Ps.

Finally, domestic brands must have a global vision and keep up with foreign markets' needs to become an emerging force leading the international trend. Anta should aim at the international fashion vane and comply with the new trend of international fashion consumption. It should actively study the international target market and brand rules and implement the strategy of seeking common ground while reserving differences. In addition, it can also strengthen cooperation with internationally renowned designers and fully introduce international advanced design concepts from the aspects of function, style, and packaging to develop an "international style" containing Chinese elements. Finally, it can introduce and promote itself to the cooperating countries with the help of favorable policies such as the "Belt and Road" initiative, BRICS cooperation, and G20 cooperation to continuously attract consumers in the international market.

## 5. Conclusion

The study found that since the Xinjiang cotton incident in March 2021, domestic brands have continuously amplified their voice through China-Chic marketing and Olympic marketing and achieved different degrees of development. Consumers' attitude toward domestic products gradually changes from madness to rationality. However, the stronger cultural self-confidence and national identity that has been formed will always exist, and the China-Chic will be the long-term path of domestic brands. In addition, Generation Z has become the most important consumer group for sports brands, including Anta. Brands must follow in their footsteps and understand their recent preferences clearly to make the right marketing decisions early on and gain an edge in the market.

This paper has certain commercial value. It analyzes Anta's successful marketing experience with the help of special events under the patriotic upsurge and puts forward some critical views on Anta's current situation and future. This paper can play a certain role in promoting the sustainable development of Anta and can also provide some references for other domestic brands.

This paper also has some limitations. First, the 185 respondents to the questionnaire are all young people between 18 and 30. The 5 respondents to the case interview are all college students. The middle-aged and elderly consumer groups did not participate in these survey activities. These groups are very different in education level, living habits, consumption concepts, and Internet usage. The results of questionnaire surveys and case interviews have certain limitations because middle-aged and elderly consumers have richer life experiences and may have different views on Anta. In the future,

questionnaires can be distributed among middle-aged and elderly groups to collect more samples. Some middle-aged and elderly people can be interviewed to obtain more comprehensive and accurate data. Besides, this paper lacks information about the views of foreign researchers and consumers on Anta. If Anta wants to become an international brand and a leader in the world fashion trend, it is crucial to include foreign consumers in the scope of research.

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