

Analyzing the Phenomenon of the Increase of Brand Awareness of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea in Chinese Market through Para-social Interactivity Theory

Beini Li ^{1, *}

¹ Crean Lutheran High School, Irvine, CA, 92618, United States

* Corresponding author: beini.li.23@stu.creanlutheran.org

Abstract. The milk tea industry in China is getting very popular now. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is one of the most well-known milk tea brands in China. This paper will focus on analyzing the particular phenomenon that happened to this brand after they applied social media. And the purpose of this study was to explore how social media impact Mixue Ice Cream & Tea mainly on the development of brand awareness and the boost of sales. The improvement of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is explained through the para-social interaction theory (PSI). After the SWOT analysis method, the research indicates that the Mixue Ice Cream & Tea mascot developed a generally positive image in customers' minds and allowed PSI to work. social media promoted Mixue Ice Cream & Tea mainly on the brand awareness and the number of sales, and Mixue Ice Cream & Tea should put more effort into social media to improve more on the different aspects of its brand.

Keywords: Social Media, Mascot, SWOT, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Nowadays, drinking milk tea has become a common thing for Chinese people. During COVID-19, the entire economy has been affected and generally going negatively. As long as the development of technology, social media becomes widely employed and popular, many brands make their account on social media to interact with their customers and get to know their customers' needs. Social media has also become a better and cheaper marketing strategy to choose to increase brand awareness. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is one of the brands that have an official account on social media and employs social media as a tool to increase their brand awareness successfully.

Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is a Chinese Bubble tea chain brand that sells bubble milk tea, fruit tea, milkshake, and ice cream of good quality and low price. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is originally targeted at the young people who are still in school or young workers in third or fourth-tier cities. However, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has expanded its market into bigger cities since 2020, and its sales started to increase in 2020 with more acknowledgment. This phenomenon is part of the attribution to employing social media cleverly.

The first time that Mixue Ice Cream & Tea uses social media as a marketing strategy is in the second half of 2021. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea published a music video that has its cartoon character as the actor on its official social media platform. This song is an earworm. Once people hear the song, they can remember it very well and repeat this song over and over in their heads. Also, because of the tension of COVID-19, social media became the most popular amusement for people who are quarantined at home. This song became well known at a moment. The brand awareness of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea got a big increase and earned people's affection. The most recent time that Mixue Ice Cream & Tea employed social media as a strategy to increase its brand awareness and sales is in June 2022. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has a logo that is a cartoon snowman. In June 2022, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea changed its profile photo which used to be a white snowman to a black snowman. This slight change attracted many social media users' attentions, as more and more people found out about the change and posted their confusion and guesses online, the topic of the Snowman turns Black became a trending topic. When this topic was on fire, the official account of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea posted the explanation of this change. It says that the snowman turned black because the snowman went to

pick mulberry and was burned by the high temperature and the fierce sun. Along with this explanation, they introduced their new summer product, a mulberry drink. People who were paying attention to this topic were amused and prompted to buy a new product. This is not the first time that they employed social media as a marketing strategy. The first time that Mixue Ice Cream & Tea applied this strategy is in the second half of 2021. The official social media account of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea published a music video. The cartoon snowman wearing a crown and holding a wand is singing “I love you”. The snowman started to be well known as the logo of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea. The number of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea’s on-ground stores doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 from 2021 to the beginning of 2022. This huge expansion shows how successful Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is in marketing after they applied social media to promote their brand and products.

1.2 Research Gap

There are some studies about Mixue Ice Cream & Tea. Xiaoqian Mo studied the growth of Mixue Ice cream & Tea in her essay — Chain Business Development of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea; Qipeng Wang studied the competition strategies of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea by writing the Analysis of Retail Format of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea. The research about Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is very little, but there is great value to investigate how social media benefit Mixue Ice Cream & Tea in increasing brand awareness.

1.3 Fill The Gap

Mixue Ice Cream & Tea was established in 1997, but it is not popular until 2021. This is attributed to the strategy that they applied in 2021, and this is established because of the huge number of social media users and the psychology of human beings. According to the research, the number of users of social media reached 4.7 billion in July 2022. This gives companies a good chance to promote their products and get a big customer base. Therefore, the influences of social media on marketing need more research and analysis. This study will be reviewed by para-social interactivity theory and be analyzed by SWOT analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition

Para-social interaction (PSI) and Parasocial relationship (PSR) were first proposed by Horton and Wohl. According to the above two authors' definition of PSI, media users will form virtual, intermediary, similar to social interaction with media figures [1] This is applied to refer to the sense of companionship experienced by users in the application of media, that is, the relationship formed between media characters or media roles similar to the real situation. Horton and Wohl mentioned both concepts in this paper in 1956 [1]. They have long been utilized interchangeably as the same term. But in the past decade, researchers began to consciously distinguish between the two. This theory belongs to the field of psychiatry first and has not received enough attention. With the development of digitalization and the popularity of television, the exploration of PSI began to turn to the field of psychology, for example, by combining PSI with the response of the audience in soap operas [2]. PSI also began to overlap with the field of psychology as a media phenomenon. Rosengren and Windahl argued that PSI can be applied as an alternative source of companionship and compensation for loneliness [3]. According to a review in 2002, the psychological components of PSI have been developing continuously. The scale designed by Rubin and others has made quantitative and qualitative research on the measurement method of PSI and how it plays a role in specific populations [4]. With the continuous development of digitalization, PSI has been deeply studied for its role in streaming media. PSI has expanded from its previous impact on television ratings to network platforms such as Youtube and Tiktok. The emerging markets derived from this (influencers, live streaming sales) have left more far-reaching influence space for PSI.

2.2 Important Results

Through the analysis of a large amount of literature, it is not difficult to see that PSI has a negligible impact on promoting consumer consumption. Under the influence of PSI, the media users will have a relationship similar to that of friends [5] with the media people they are concerned about, thus generating hope to talk with them and feel a connection. In addition, the time of using TV also shows that it is related to PSI [6]. When looking for the variables that affect the formation of quasi-social relations, Giles said that it should be fully aware of the relationship between the audience and the media figures in a similar real scene, and the suggestion of this relationship depends on certain specific factors, including the judgment of users on the attractiveness of media figures [4]. Interpersonal attraction usually includes three dimensions: appearance attraction, social attraction, and task attraction [7]. In the literature reviewed later, most of them also discussed and built models around these three points.

With the development of the Internet, research on PSI in the field of new media has increased and increased dramatically from 2005 to 2015 [8]. This shows that the impact of PSI in the field of new media has become an urgent need for research and an issue of interest to experts. The research scope of PSI has also expanded to all aspects with the expansion of the Internet. For example, the study of the relationship between PSI and Twitter for sports athletes [9]. This paper makes a statistical and quantitative analysis of the correlation between PSI and the time spent by users on the media, the correlation between PSI and affinity, and the correlation between athletes' social attraction and PSI, to find the influence of PSI on athletes' fans. There are also in-depth studies on the role of PSI in social shopping websites. A paper points out that social shopping websites are more interactive and attractive, providing customers with more opportunities for PSI, and ultimately affecting purchase decisions [10]. This article highlights the advantages of social shopping sites that are different from traditional shopping, such as building social functions to increase social attraction, helping customers interact with celebrities, and examining how PSI affects consumer decision-making. Through the analysis, it is concluded that the social attraction and task attraction of social shopping websites have a significant positive correlation with users' PSI, and affect customers' business decisions. This is crucial for this article to analyze the impact of PSI on consumers. In the aspect of influencer marketing, some articles also explain how PSI works between influencers and fans. Different from the traditional model, in new media such as Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook, the relationship between the influencer and the user is bidirectional. Users can comment and discuss, and the influencer can also respond, which creates opportunities for the impact of PSI. Some studies have shown that PSI is positively correlated with consumers' purchase intention in the sales of women's beauty and makeup [11].

2.3 Summary

Although PSI's research on new media has attracted wide attention, its speed has not kept pace with the development of media technology. By 2015, research on new media only accounted for less than 20 % of PSI research [12]. This shows the necessity of PSI research in the new media industry. At the same time, due to the impact of the Covid19, the frequency of people using Internet shopping and entertainment during isolation has also increased significantly, which provides a large amount of objective data for the study of consumer decision-making by PSI. Most of the literature points out that the attractiveness of three dimensions has a positive correlation with PSI, which shows that the study of how PSI affects consumer decision-making has a positive impact in reality.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

Based on PSI and marketing theory, this paper SWOT research methods. Combined with the company's situation and the consumer's response to the marketing strategy related to PSI, the strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by the company are listed, which is the SWOT analysis. Using SWOT analysis, it can be clearer that PSI for the enterprise marketing opportunities and challenges.

3.2 Mixue Ice Cream & Tea

Founded in 1997, the brand sells fresh ice cream and tea drinks. The brand adopts a franchise model for store expansion. In 2007, Mixue Ice cream & Tea opened its franchise and expanded rapidly in Henan, China. Since the establishment of Honey Snow Ice City, it has been committed to providing customers with cost-effective and high-quality products. In 2018, the brand opened an overseas franchise in Vietnam. Today, the number of franchise stores in China has exceeded 10,000, and developed into a well-known tea beverage brand.

Mixue Ice cream & Tea learned Starbucks to create their LOGO. Like Starbucks, to deepen its brand image in the minds of customers, in 2019 create a dedicated brand IP - SnowKing. SnowKing holding an ice cream stick, wearing a crown, wearing a red cloak. The shape of the mascot is lovely and simple, very easy for customers to form a memory, and can deepen the brand image of Mixue Ice cream & Tea. Online stores, product packaging, brand's official website can see the figure of SnowKing. And the brand uses the image of SnowKing IP to create peripheral products such as mugs and pillows and designs the expression photos of Snow King for social software such as WeChat to give content to the brand IP.

For products and prices, Mixue Ice cream & Tea pursues higher cost performance. The products of Mixue Ice cream & Tea are mainly divided into ice cream and drinks. The price of ice cream is 3 yuan to 10 yuan, of which 3-yuan ice cream is the main product of the brand, with the highest sales. In addition, the price of fresh fruit tea and milk tea is also 4-15 yuan, which fully embodies the cheap price marketing concept of Mixue Ice cream & Tea. Mascot design for the brand gains customers' favor

3.3 SWOT Analysis

3.3.1 Strength

Mascot design for the brand gains customers' favor. The popularity of the brand also benefits from the influence of its mascot. Nearly 90 % of customers said they made an impression on the brand by seeing Snow King. Among the customers who said they knew the mascot of the brand; the vast majority of customers gave a positive and neutral evaluation of the shape and popularity of the mascot. This became the first step in building a PSI between the brand and customers. Because the mascot became an influencer, and by using social media to build up a funny positive image in the social media users' minds, the customer's impression of the brand will also become positive. Therefore, the image of the mascot helps the company's brand awareness and goodwill.

Streaming media marketing for the company to win visibility. In the consumer survey, nearly 75 % of consumers know Mixue Ice cream & Tea through streaming media. The relevant channels include the sales of influencers through Tiktok, as well as advertising on other streaming media. Almost all customers think that the brand's original theme song left a deep impression on them. The brand's theme song began marketing Tiktok and Bilibili (a Chinese Youtube-like video site) during the Covid-19 pandemic, becoming popular on the Internet for its simple melody and cute mascot videos. After the video and song became popular, Mixue Ice cream & Tea launched offline activities. The event allows customers to go to the offline store in public to sing the theme song to get a discount or even free. This activity enabled many influencers to have the subject of filming, and the influencers took the lead in increasing visibility on the Internet.

3.3.2 Weakness

Mascots have a limited impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. Although the design of the mascot was generally well received by consumers, only five consumers who knew the brand through the mascot said their consumption decisions were influenced by the mascot. More consumers choose the brand based on its low price or other aspects (support for charity). In further inquiries to customers, many customers said that the mere appearance of the mascot was not sufficient to allow them to choose the brand in practice.

Mixue Ice cream & Tea may not be enough on streaming media. Among the consumers who said that they had purchased Mixue Ice cream & Tea under the influence of influencers, nearly half of the consumers said that their favorite influencers did not sell the products of the brand frequently. Some consumers further replied that they had only seen the brand selling once or twice on Tiktok or other media and that their favorite influencers with a bunch of followers had not sold the brand's tea.

3.3.3 Opportunity

Mascot SnowKing has greater marketing potential. Although the mascot is not prominent in influencing consumer decision-making, all consumers surveyed said that the mascot did impress them more than other brands. Mixue Ice cream & Tea is not the only brand with its mascot. For example, another tea brand, Chabaidao, whose mascot is a panda. But SnowKing's image is more vivid and more touching. It is not only cute but also jokes. Some customers said it is more vivid and adorable compared with just lovely mascots. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is already benefited from the controllability of how the PSI works by controlling its mascot's image that is shown to the customers because they created the influencer for their brand by themselves. They should put more effort into building their brand image in this way. For example, making more animations makes the mascot more popular and attracts children to buy products related to the mascot, thereby improving the mascot's shortcomings in influencing consumer decision-making.

Influencers have a greater impact on consumers' purchase of products. Among the customers who said they knew the brand because of streaming media and influencers, most of them said that their purchasing decisions were influenced by influencers. For consumers who were willing to reply to the emails, some said their main way to shop online was through influencers' streaming room. They think influencers are more reliable than other approaches. On the one hand, it is because they have used the products; on the other hand, influencers' income is based more on credibility. This shows that influencers have greater sales ability. For fans who love some influencers, influencers have an Internet connection with them, and they are more cordial and trusting of these influencers.

3.3.4 Threaten

The brand has a large number of competitors, and they are marketing more frequently on streaming media than Mixue Ice cream & Tea. Most of the consumer's favorite brands in addition to the snow ice city, also include Cha Yan Yue Se, Cha Baidao, and other brands. Among them, the marketing frequency of Cha Baidao and Naixue Tea on streaming media is higher than that of Mixue. This means that there will be more people choosing Mixue's competitors, and Mixue may lose market share due to insufficient investment in streaming media.

4. Results & Discussion

Through analyzing the data on the internet, Mixue has formed a larger PSI for consumers in mascot marketing and theme song marketing and has greater popularity through this. However, the brand's investment in streaming media is not enough, and the marketing value of mascots needs to be further developed. The marketing investment around the mascot and streaming media constituted an opportunity for the brand. Competitors spend more on streaming media than Mixue which has become a threat.

The results of the discussion support the hypothesis of the literature reviewed that PSI marketing can create an impact on consumer decision-making. And on this basis, the marketing strategy for Mixue formed recommendations.

5. Conclusions

The research on the PSI explained the phenomenon brought up by the Chinese Milk Tea brand --- Mixue Ice Cream & Tea. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea leave a deep impression on their customers through the influencer that they created on their own. Follow the influence of mascots to promote their brands and products. This has allowed them to implement an increase in brand awareness. Therefore, it shows more possibility that Mixue Ice Cream & Tea can keep developing its brand by exploring this field and creating more content about its mascot. This paper shows the positive impact social media have on brand awareness development and purchase decisions. However, there is still a lack of a sample that is similar to Mixue Ice Cream & Tea which created a mascot, put a story on it, and exploited its image as a medium to interact with the customers on the internet. Thus, there is a need for further exploration of the details about how to create an avatar that is very to the target customers' liking through social media, so that can create PSI in a more controllable way.

References

- [1] Horton, Donald, and R. Richard Wohl. "Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance." *Psychiatry* 19.3 (1956): 215-229.
- [2] McQuail, Denis. "The television audience: A revised perspective." *Sociology of mass communications* (1972): 135-165.
- [3] Rosengren, Karl Erik, and Sven Windahl. *Mass media consumption as a functional alternative*. University of Lund, Department of Sociology, 1971.
- [4] Giles, David C. "Parasocial interaction: A review of the literature and a model for future research." *Media psychology* 4.3 (2002): 279-305.
- [5] Hall, J., et al. "Improving the understanding of parasocial interaction: A review of its effects, conceptualizations, and antecedents." *NCA 93rd Annual Convention*. 2007.
- [6] Gleich, Uli. "Parasocial interaction with people on the screen." *New horizons in media psychology*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 1997. 35-55.
- [7] McCroskey, Linda L., James C. McCroskey, and Virginia P. Richmond. "Analysis and improvement of the measurement of interpersonal attraction and homophily." *Communication Quarterly* 54.1 (2006): 1-31.
- [8] Frederick, Evan L., et al. "Why we follow: An examination of parasocial interaction and fan motivations for following athlete archetypes on Twitter." *International journal of sport communication* 5.4 (2012): 481-502
- [9] Liebers, Nicole, and Holger Schramm. "Parasocial interactions and relationships with media characters--an inventory of 60 years of research." *Communication Research Trends* 38.2 (2019): 4-31.
- [10] Zheng, Xiabing, et al. "Role of technology attraction and parasocial interaction in social shopping websites." *International Journal of Information Management* 51 (2020): 102043.
- [11] Sokolova, Karina, and Hajer Kefi. "Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions." *Journal of retailing and consumer services* 53 (2020): 101742.
- [12] Jarzyna, Carol Laurent. *Introversion and the use of parasocial interaction to satisfy belongingness needs*. Diss. Loyola University Chicago, 2011.