

Analysis of Factors Lead to the Success of Sexy Tea

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Abstract. Since 2018, many people have been obsessed with Sexy Tea, a well-known milk tea chain brand that originated and is rooted in Changsha but recently expanded into new markets that opened new stores in Chongqing, Wuhan, and Nanjing. The fans of Sexy Tea are willing to wait for six to eight hours just for a cup of milk tea. What is Sexy Tea's charm? Why are people so crazy about it? The purpose of this research was to detect the reasons behind Sexy Tea's success. This research paper adopted the marketing mix theory to analyze Sexy Tea's present business strategies including price, promotion, place, and product. In addition, based on SWOT analysis, this paper fully analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Sexy Tea, which can help the brand to formulate further relevant business strategies. At last, the research result can help Sexy Tea make reasonable improvements and become a better representative Chinese milk tea brand.

Keywords: Sexy Tea; Marketing Mix Theory; 4Ps; SWOT.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The milk tea industry has attracted attention in the Chinese market since the beginning of 2017, mainly facing the young people of the emerging generation [1]. From 2018 to the present, Sexy Tea has been very popular. From the beginning, it only opened stores in Changsha, with an average of one every ten meters, but every branch was still full of people. By the beginning of August this year, a new branch was opened in Nanjing. The shopping mall was blocked on an opening day, and it needed security guards to conduct crowd control. Originally, Sexy Tea could only be purchased in Changsha, which has brought inconvenience to customers, but they employed Changsha's unique IP address as a marketing strategy to attract more people. According to official Weibo statistics, when the first branch opened in Wuhan, people waited for more than eight hours for one cup of milk tea, which to a certain extent exceeded the travel time for many tourists to and from Changsha. What is the reason for this to make people ignore the impact of the pandemic from 2020 to the present, and queue up without hesitation just for this Internet celebrity milk tea? What is the reason for choosing Sexy Tea among so many famous milk tea brands? Because of the sudden popularity of Sexy Tea in 2018, it has occupied a place on major platforms and has become a check-in point for the younger generation. Young people went to Changsha to check in for Sexy Tea, and the photos of their punch-in were widely spread on the Internet. Soon, every tea shop in Changsha was already crowded with people, which invisibly attracted more people to go to Changsha to grab Sexy Tea.

Sexy Tea, which is different from HEYTEA positions itself as fruit tea, takes the road of Chinese tea culture, positioning itself in the traditional Chinese culture, and transmits its ideas to the consumer terminals in a unique marketing way, so that Sexy Tea can stand out in several new Chinese milk tea market segments. Due to the outbreak of the pandemic, according to Yiou data, as of May 1, 2021, the number of Sexy Tea stores was 336, and the store closure accounted for about 21% of its total number of stores [2]. Luv Liang, the founder of Sexy Tea, said that in the face of self-save from the pandemic, Sexy Tea will open branches in Liuyang, Zhuzhou, Yueyang, Wuhan, and other cities, which represent that Sexy Tea has ushered in a very important transformation. Secondly, since the

popularity of Sexy Tea, people are very curious about the reasons for its famous. There is a lot of research on the Internet, for example, Wu and other scholars have studied why the packaging and service of Sexy Tea brought them great success [1]. And Yiwen and others have studied the inconvenience brought to people by the marketing strategy of Sexy Tea [2].

1.2 Research Gap

Due to the outbreak of the pandemic, Sexy Tea has undergone a complete transformation, not only focusing on local Changsha brands but also going to all parts of China. As mentioned above, although Sexy Tea has closed many stores due to the pandemic, it is still successful so far, and among so many high-end milk tea brands, such as HEYTEA, and COCO, it still stands out. What's behind its success? What is the reason for its still standing up to this day? This is still blank and nobody explains that. Thus, this paper will make up for this gap and delve into the reasons why Sexy Tea is still so popular after the closure of the store during the epidemic. This will help young people understand the marketing strategy of Sexy Tea and the real reason for its popularity.

1.3 Fill The Gap

Therefore, this paper will combine the research background and phenomenon, assuming that the answer to the research question is that Sexy Tea adopted the strategy of hunger marketing to stimulate people's desire to buy and the sense of home honor of the local people in Changsha, and Sexy Tea mainly focuses on healthy tea, which to a certain extent makes many people were attracted by new low-fat and low-sugar tea drinks because they were afraid that milk tea was unhealthy. In addition, Sexy Tea's brand packaging and brand recognition with Chinese cultural characteristics have strongly aroused the Chinese people's sense of identity with Chinese culture. To examine the hypotheses, this paper will apply the 4P theory and conjoint analysis to analyze the real reasons why Sexy Tea is still popular for 4 years since 2018 even though there is a pandemic hindering its success. Moreover, this paper will conclude the reasons for constructing a SWOT model and Porter Five forces to explain. At the end of this article, it will provide some reasonable advice to help Sexy Tea accomplish more popularity and reputation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Marketing Mix Theory

There is a large volume of published research describing the role of the marketing mix theory which is also known as 4Ps. Neil Borden was the first person who came up with the term “marketing mix” and drew up a set of 12 elements. The early marketing concept is similar to the notion of the marketing mix, based on the idea of action parameters. Later on, McCarthy refined Borden’s idea into 4 elements named 4Ps in his book Basic Marketing. The “4Ps” refers to four key elements of marketing, which are “product”, “promotion”, “price”, “place” and the “s” stands for “strategy” [3]. The 4P theory is a set of tools for companies to investigate the market to influence consumers to buy their products.

2.2 Important Results

A product is a physical item or service that consumers are ready to pay money for, and it is the key element of the marketing mix, and a product serves as a bundle of benefits attained by consumers in an exchange transaction as Yiwen and others said [2]. In 2021, Dedi did research to find the relationships between consumers’ purchasing decisions and the features of products, such as product form, product quality, product type, product utilization, and product durability, and he found that the effect of the Product Features variable on the purchasing decision variable is positive and significant [4]. Further in the investigation of milk tea that Wingnam and others did in 2021, they found that product research and innovation would establish technical competitiveness and give the company a

new growth point to meet the diversified consumer needs and establish consumer loyalty [5]. Therefore, companies should enrich product content and features and make innovations to attract more consumers and increase consumers' purchasing intention.

Traditional marketing is no longer accepted by the young generation, to be replaced by new media marketing. In order to promote their products and engage more with young customers, milk tea brands increased online marketing and corporate with internet celebrities [6].

To increase customers' purchase intention, milk tea brands adopted online promotions that heavily promote themselves on social media such as Weibo and Wechat. As social platforms rise, people love to share their life by posting pictures of beautiful scenery or fine food to acquire envy from others. Some milk tea brands like HEYTEA and Sexy Tea adopted hunger marketing to form a "hot-sale" scene to attract more customers. Especially for young people who do not have enough money to buy luxuries, a cup of popular milk tea is the best substitute that can show off on their social platforms [7]. Moreover, a positive purchase experience motivates the customer towards repeat purchases and ultimately brand loyalty [8]. Overall, these studies highlight the need for online promotion.

Pricing strategy is a very important strategy for a brand to survive in this competitive market, and they should choose the strategy that is suitable for themselves. Price is a key component of the overall value proposition, as Yiwen and others said, "price includes basic price, discount price, payment time, and loan terms, and the factors in pricing are determining the cost of a product, marketing strategy, and expenses related to distribution, advertising expenses, or any kind of piece change in the market" [2]. According to Ingrid and others' survey on food choices of people of different income groups, it is found that price is a significant factor affecting people's food choices, especially for low-income people [9]. Therefore, it is very important to formulate a suitable price strategy for the target customer group selected by the brand. However, in recent years, Covid-19 has influenced the whole market a lot. Therefore, Chopra and other scholars investigated precedents of most business models that companies are using, so that in this special pandemic time, more companies can find the best pricing strategy for themselves [10].

According to the analysis of factors influencing the purchasing decision on milk tea in Bangkok, the authors argued that the majority of milk tea shops will be within the distribution channel, and use almost no mediator [11]. People usually grab a cup of milk tea while they are working on other things at the same time. Therefore, beverage shops usually open in populated areas that can bring more customer flows [12].

If milk tea brands can update purchasing channels, customers can order milk tea both online and offline [13]. The location of milk tea shops is also convenient for customers who like to order online. However, to ensure the delicate taste of freshly made drinks, the location of milk tea shops should not be far from residential areas and commercial areas. Sexy Tea, as a milk tea brand that sells healthy, natural, and original tea-based drinks, freshness is indispensable.

2.3 Summary

Overall, these studies show that the marketing mix theory is significant for companies to survive in the competitive market, especially in this difficult pandemic time. Companies need to work further on product innovation to meet diversified consumer needs so that they can attract more customers and build strong consumer loyalty. They can also utilize the internet to proceed with online promotion, which can increase brand exposure to stimulate customers' desire to buy. Pricing is also significant because, in the food industry, people tend to think of price as an essential factor to buy a product. Because of the economic recession resulting from the pandemic, people will pay more attention to whether the money spent on the product is worth it. Therefore, companies should pay more attention to choosing the appropriate price strategy to determine their price positioning to meet the needs of customers. At last, the place strategy is also important. The place strategy can also be seen as a promotion strategy sometimes because opening up a store in a prosperous area is a kind of promotion. People would stop by and watch the advertisement, so it is really helpful for a company to choose the right place to settle. For the stores that sell milk tea, they should choose to open in shopping malls or

famous tourist attractions, because at this time, people tend to go out more for shopping or traveling due to the control policy during the pandemic time. Therefore, milk tea stores can open in places that have large consumer flows to increase their sales.

Although there are analyses about how to choose appropriate marketing mix strategies for many kinds of industries, no one pays much attention to the famous milk tea brand called Sexy Tea in China. Therefore, exploring this certain milk tea brand can be helpful to find its secret to success, at the same time find its disadvantages so that they can further improve themselves for better development.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This article conducts an in-depth discussion and analysis of Sexy Tea by using the SWOT analysis model. The SWOT analysis model is a significant tool in marketing that is usually used to analyze a company's current situation, including internal (strength and weakness) and external (opportunity and threat) factors.

The SWOT analysis model mainly helps determine the internal and external factors that could have an influence on Sexy Tea based on the marketing mix theory of 4Ps and analyzes the brand's own strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats. This is to help Sexy Tea evaluate the existing marketing strategy, discover the reasons why the brand can really win over other famous milk tea brands, and then put forward suggestions on whether new marketing strategies need to be adopted, and how to adopt new strategies. Huiyu and other scholars had research on Sexy Tea's strong competitor, HEYTEA, and they also conducted a SWOT analysis to help better understand the current place that HEYTEA is in [14]. They applied a table to show the four elements of the SWOT analysis, it was really clear and easy to understand, and it gave great help to further research on HEYTEA's marketing strategies.

3.2 Sexy Tea

Sexy Tea was first funded by Luv Liang in 2013, and it is a modern tea shop that mainly focuses on new Chinese-style milk tea drinks and desserts. It only locates in Changsha Hunan in the early years. The brand uses a variety of traditional Chinese tea and fresh milk to create a brand-new Chinese-style milk tea. On the basis of the traditional tea base, it adds whipped cream and crushed nuts to increase the innovative taste so that it can meet the consumption needs of the new generation of young people.

Sexy Tea asserts that while China is in a time of great economic development, it is also essential to consolidate and develop Chinese traditional culture and promote its identity of it to the new generation. Therefore, they attach great importance to their brand image, and their logo is good proof. On their logo, there is a beautiful girl, Cui Yingying, the heroine of the traditional Chinese novel "The Story of the West Chamber". Behind Cui Yingying is a traditional Chinese hexagonal window lattice. The entire logo is made of traditional Chinese red color and has a handwritten brand name at the bottom. It is very recognizable and has an antique atmosphere.

Moreover, Sexy Tea not only pays attention to its logo image, but it also pays attention to the creation of each cup of tea. The brand gives each cup of milk tea a nice name and spends a lot of thought to create a product story. It spends plenty of money to buy the copyright of the court painter Shining Lang and other famous paintings to integrate traditional Chinese art into their tea drinks. This has successfully stimulated the cultural identity of the new generation of young consumers, thereby creating their unique brand image and stabilizing the customer base.

Based on these, Sexy Tea has successfully become a landmark in Changsha. People would travel to Changsha only for a cup of milk tea from them. The brand has largely stimulated the traveling and economic growth in this city.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

3.3.1 Strength

First, the most important thing that makes Sexy Tea successful is its promotion. nowadays, young people pursue a quality of life than the previous generation, and milk tea is one of the main consumer goods in their lives [15]. Thanks to the popular Internet, people see product pictures of Sexy Tea on TikTok, Weibo, and other social media platforms and this kind of online promotion generates so many people to line up. This queuing effect will stimulate people's curiosity and desire to explore so that a large number of people will go to Changsha to be early adopters. Furthermore, the style and image of Sexy Tea displayed on various social media platforms give customers a unique sense of close friend, attracting a large number of fans [16]. Despite that, Sexy Tea has a very smart strategy in that it did not only focus on its brand, it cooperated with its competitor HEYTEA and launched 300 sets of co-branded gift boxes on July 21, 2020, raising a lot of fame [17]. In October of the same year, Sexy Tea and Saturnbird, a new Internet celebrity coffee brand also born in Changsha, jointly opened a store and made their co-branded products, which is also an effective approach to attract local Changsha people.

Secondly, the choice of location also plays a crucial role. In the beginning, Sexy Tea only opened in Changsha, so it had the title "Changsha Exclusive IP". Sexy Tea has always insisted on opening stores directly and not franchising to effectively control store operation, product quality, and raw material inventory. Because of Sexy Tea's fame, customers are asking for coverage all over the world. Affected by COVID-19, at the end of 2020, Sexy Tea finally walked out of Changsha, opened its first branch in Wuhan, and gradually opened to Shenzhen and Nanjing [16]. Despite that, Sexy Tea was also forced to launch a new-style takeaway service, and now it has no difference in taste from dine-in.

Each drink of Sexy Tea uses fresh milk instead of creamer and is made from freshly brewed raw leaf tea, emphasizing the texture of Chinese traditional tea [16]. It adopts the new concept of "Chinese tea made in a west way", which perfectly integrates Western-style tea into traditional Chinese tea, and it has successfully won the favor of the new generation. What's more, Sexy Tea's products are divided into several categories, such as cream, pure tea, or fruit tea, so as to meet the needs of different customers. Additionally, Sexy Tea also displays tea, teacups, canvas bags, and other peripherals in its new retail stores, and will introduce new products occasionally. These cultural and creative peripherals with strong brand style and open-mindedness have broadened the use scenarios of the brand, extended the vitality of the brand, and gained the loyalty of its customers.

Lastly, in the eyes of many customers, HEYTEA and Nayuki are like Internet celebrity brands, but Sexy Tea is very low-key. The big reason is the price. The price of Sexy Tea is very approachable, and it is affordable for the class of students. With the novelty and innovation of taste and packaging, people love it. According to China Business News, only 1.34% of consumers who have drunk Sexy Tea do not like it, while 8.56% of consumers do not like HEYTEA [18].

In conclusion, all 4p has an influence on the consumer will, which makes the Sexy Tea successful.

3.3.2 Weakness

The first and most obvious disadvantage of Sexy Tea is the geographical limitation. Although it has begun to go out of Changsha and open some branches in other places, the operation strategy of direct sales and no franchise will still make Sexy Tea have a lot of limitations in the new milk tea market.

In addition, when it started online takeaway sales, Sexy Tea was exposed to the problem of unsatisfactory drinks and non-dairy creamers [19]. Although the official of Sexy Tea has given a reasonable explanation, there are still many customers who leave Sexy Tea, resulting in serious polarization of the evaluation.

Finally, due to the huge popularity of Sexy Tea, many brands have begun to imitate its Chinese style [19]. Due to the lack of awareness of trademark protection and the number of Sexy Tea stores in very few areas, it still suffered a lot and buried hidden dangers in future development.

In general, the main disadvantage of Sexy Tea is mainly divided into 3 parts: geographical limitation, the polarization of the evaluation, and lack of awareness of trademark protection.

3.3.3 Opportunity

The opportunities for Sexy Tea are from its place and promotion strategy. The opportunities can be acquired from threats if Sexy Tea can make some changes to their promotion and place strategy along with the social situation. As the Covid-19 epidemic situation is under control, the domestic economy gradually gets recovered, thus the milk tea industry will be benefited. However, Sexy Tea cannot continue the “regional hunger marketing” anymore. Sexy Tea realized its disadvantage as well, it adjusted its operational strategy and expanded its brand into new markets. For now, Sexy Tea has already opened a few stores in Chongqing, Wuhan, and Nanjing, and these stores are very welcomed by local customers. If Sexy Tea continually expands its market, it might become a representative milk tea brand that can show new Chinese tea culture.

The second opportunity for Sexy Tea is to combine different local cultures and promote. For example, the famous milk tea brand HEYTEA launched city-limited products to attract local consumers. Once Sexy Tea plans to enter a new city to open stores, they can combine different local cultures to develop new featured products. Furthermore, people from different places have different favor for tastes. People from northern China mostly like salty taste food, but people from southern China mostly like sweeter food. Therefore, product development and innovation are also critical for new market development. Once Sexy Tea develops more featured products that combine cultures from different areas, more consumers will be attracted by their ingenious products.

For the threat of strong competitors, there are three workable solutions: first is to cooperate with other top milk tea brands. Sexy Tea had already launched a joint product with HEYTEA in 2020 that had been favored by the younger generation [20]. Since the younger generation is the main force of milk tea consumption, newfangled products and online promotion are the most important factors. Secondly, a mature brand needs to own a set a complete supply chain. Sexy Tea opened a pop-up store in Shenzhen earlier, but it did not last long. According to the report from therapees, the location selection of Sexy Tea is based on the distance of its supple chain [21]. The reason that the Shenzhen store closed so quickly was the distance supply chain is too far. Sexy Tea has already found the solution that they recently established a new supply chain management company in order to control the cost from its source. The last solution is to develop its brand into second and third-tier cities that has smaller city size but an unsaturated market. As a famous and influential milk tea brand, Sexy Tea has enough ability to compete with other brands.

3.3.4 Threaten

The threats of Sexy Tea are mainly from their promotion and place strategy. The place strategy of Sexy Tea was to focus on Changsha city and its surrounding cities. This regional “hunger marketing” worked very well and attracted numerous tourists from all over the country, however, since Covid-19 started, the tourism industry of Changsha city has been hard hit, which led to the outcome of Sexy Tea intensively closing its stores three times, about eighty-seven stores were closed. Sexy Tea’ stores are spread to all overpopulated places of Changsha and people can find several Sexy Tea stores within one business zone. This operation mode can effectively control products’ quality and take control of their material inventory, but also result in internal competition. If this internal competition still exists, every Sexy Tea store would face a loss of customers, even worse, close more stores.

For its promotion strategy, Sexy Tea was the first few to start “cultural marketing” that deeply adopted the Chinese style to promote the brand. Unexpectedly, this Chinese style of marketing is easy to be imitated by other milk tea brands. For example, Bawang Chaji, a newly rising Chinese style milk tea brand, was named after the Chinese historical story "Farewell to My Concubine". At the same time, the brand adopted traditional Chinese operas as visual symbols to create their logo, as well as their products and offline stores [22]. This brand has already won its own market and opened nearly 40 stores in the Southeast Asian market. In addition, Sexy Tea is also facing the strongest competitors in the milk tea industry: the number of stores opened by HEYTEA rose from 80 to 390 in 2017-2019,

and the number of stores opened by Nayuki Tea was nearly 200 in less than four years [23]. More and more imitators will come out and strong competitors won't stop their forward steps, Sexy Tea must fix its residual problems and explore its cultural uniqueness, otherwise, Sexy Tea will lose brand loyalty from its consumers.

4. Results

In conclusion, there are many advantages of Sexy Tea, such as a unique brand image, insistence on healthy tea, a fusion of Chinese and Western tea production, affordable price, and innovation of co-branded with competitors. At the same time, there are also many opportunities outside, such as the vast Chinese market and solid customer loyalty. However, they still need a lot of effort to develop themselves. Sexy Tea is too focused on one local market in its early days, and it would sacrifice a lot for them to step into the whole Chinese market. They are also facing the difficulties of new online store forms and the hidden threat of new plagiarized brands. Besides, there are many existing strong milk tea brands such as HEYTEA and Nayuki in this industry, and Sexy Tea should work harder to compete with them.

5. Discussion

Combining the marketing mix theory and SWOT analysis model, it is easily found that for Sexy Tea, the product features variable has a positive effect on the consumer purchasing decision variables [4]. Sexy Tea works hard on its brand image building, and its distinguishable logo, special healthy tea drinks, and its efforts on protecting Chinese traditional culture have great benefits for young people. Moreover, the online promotion of Sexy Tea is also a great success, and it increases the consumer purchasing desire. They also create a new style of online selling form so that it ensures the taste of their products is the same as those sold in the offline stores. Besides, the price and place strategies are also significant. As said above, suitable prices and places are important for a brand to increase its sales. Sexy Tea has verified these two, its lower price than other famous milk tea brands has attracted plenty of young student consumers and established its consumer loyalty. At last, although Sexy Tea only opened stores in Changsha, it mostly chose prosperous commercial areas to increase its sales and exposure to the public.

There are certain suggestions for them to improve. First of all, sticking to the brand image and further propagating the Chinese culture is the most significant way for them. Nowadays, people are paying more and more attention to national cultural identity, and they want to see more Chinese-style products. Innovation is of great help to them, their efforts in giving a unique story and name to each product and their respect for traditional Chinese culture have brought a good brand impression to consumers, so they should work more on that. The main weakness of Sexy Tea and the difficulty it is facing is an extension. Although there are lots of opportunities in the whole Chinese market, their supplement chain may not be able to catch up. Since the brand is focusing on healthy Chinese tea basics and fresh milk and nuts, the cost of its raw material is really high. As a result, it could be hard for Sexy Tea to enter the first-tier cities in China because of the expensive rents and their low-price strategy. Therefore, they could take more in-depth cooperation with suppliers, so that they can get lower supply prices to reduce the costs of raw materials. Sexy Tea is also good at online promotion according to the SWOT analysis, so it is also helpful for them to continue increasing its exposure to the public on the internet. While considering entering a new local market, Sexy Tea could utilize social media platforms to see the reaction of the consumers of the market and then decide whether to attack it. In this way, co-brand with some existing locals can be helpful. The consumer loyalty of local brands can be switched to Sexy Tea while they are cooperating. In conclusion, Sexy Tea can be improved in many ways, and more suitable strategies should be further studied to develop its brand in the future.

6. Conclusion

This article applies the specific case study of Sexy Tea, and it has fully demonstrated the influences that the marketing mix theory of 4Ps has on the consumer purchasing decision in the previous investigations that other scholars have done. This research exploited SWOT analysis and a combination of marketing mix theory to analyze its strength and weakness, which figure out why this brand is so popular in China and draw the conclusion that Sexy Tea is famous for its special Chinese culture and unique Changsha IP. In this Internet age, many customers of younger generations come here. Although there is one store every ten meters in Changsha, there are still long queues at every door. Of course, Sexy Tea did not let them down, they were satisfied with the right price and healthy and diverse beverage choices, and the brand also created a lot of peripheral products to attract customers. However, Sexy Tea lacks awareness of protecting its own brand, and more and more imitators have led to its shrinking market share. In addition, competitors such as HEYTEA and Nayuki have gradually expanded across the country and even abroad in recent years. However, Sexy Tea has been limited to Changsha due to the expensive raw materials of its products. In recent years, due to the impact of the epidemic, it had to go out of Changsha and opened branches in several cities. Thus, this made its market limited to expansion. Although this hunger marketing strategy indeed attracted a lot of customers and popularity, in the long run, customers will lose their loyalty to it.

So far, Sexy Tea's branding has been particularly good in the market. They have their own unique brand image, special publicity methods, suitable and friendly prices, and good geographical location, which all have positive effects on customer purchasing decisions. Their hunger marketing strategy is really making them successful at the moment, s at the same time, they need to pay attention to their own shortcomings and the crises they face, and gradually adjust their marketing strategies to discover the path that is most suitable for their own development.

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