

An Analysis of Xiaomi Smartphones' Online Marketing Branding Strategy Using the Brand Equity Model

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Abstract. The Chinese smartphone market has entered a white-hot phase over the past decade, with fewer and fewer new manufacturers stepping into the smartphone market to compete. As of Q2 2022, Samsung, Apple and Xiaomi are the top three mobile brands in the world in terms of supply. The author selected the brand equity model to measure Xiaomi's online brand marketing strategy as the research question, examines how Xiaomi has managed to make its own brand amid-st the technological barriers of its competitors. Its successful online brand marketing theory can be a useful reference for similar companies and brands that need online brand building. The author uses questionnaires, literature research, case studies and induction to analyse Xiaomi's unique online brand marketing. The conclusion is that Xiaomi has built up high brand equity in its online marketing and used the fan economy, the Netflix effect to increase customer stickiness and high brand influence.

Keywords: Brand marketing; Brand communication; Marketing; Business management; Product differentiation.

1. Introduction

Since 2008, Chinese smartphone market has developed rapidly. In 2015, there are more than 100 Chinese smart phone manufacturers with fierce competition [1]. At present, China's mobile phone market is basically saturated. From 2008 to 2022, the market homogenization competition intensified, the products of the fuzzy brand positioning were eliminated. On August 16, 2011, Xiaomi officially launched its first Xiaomi Mobile phone, with the tagline "Discover Black Technology, born for fever" being the slogan of the event [2]. Xiaomi's first-generation mobile phones were known for being cheap and high-priced, it focuses on the route of customer experience and value for money. Xiaomi has used experiential marketing and product differentiation, good online media operations and O2O strategies to complete its brand communication and survive in the face of fierce competition. Xiaomi's mobile phone market share in China is up to 15.9% until Q1 2022.

The development of brand competitiveness is significantly influenced by brand communication strategy. To make the information about the brand enter into the public's mind, arouse consumers' purchase interest and recognize the brand in their mind, they will associate the brand when they want a smartphone. In the white-hot industry of mobile phone, if the brand image can not impress customers, it is easy to be eliminated by the market. Xiaomi survived in the market with its unique brand communication strategy.

In this research, in order to achieve the research purpose of Xiaomi's online marketing branding strategy, the author selected Xiaomi's brand communication strategy, online short media video marketing and product differentiation as the research objectives. The methods of questionnaire, interview, literature research, case study and inductive summary are used. The strengths and weaknesses of the strategy are analysed and certain recommendations are given.

2. Literature Review

Brand equity is the added worth that is placed on goods or services. Along with the pricing, market share, and profitability the brand generates, it is mirrored in how consumers feel, think, and act toward the brand. There are five components to it: brand cognition, brand association, brand loyalty, and other intellectual assets. Brand awareness is the capacity of prospective customers to identify or recall

that a brand represents a specific category of goods. Cognitive quality includes consumer's product cognition, enterprise cognition and symbol cognition. In the consumer brand knowledge system, brand association is the information node connected to the brand. Brand loyalty is a measurement of customers' long-term and recurrent purchase and usage of a brand, which generates a certain amount of trust and emotional upkeep. Other proprietary assets are trademarks, patents, channel relationships, etc [3]. This report uses brand equity to evaluate the brand communication effect of Xiaomi through multiple dimensions.

Brand Communication is a vital component and instrument of brand management that allows firms to educate, convince, enlighten, teach, recall, and improve the understanding of their stakeholders about the brand, its strengths, values, foundations, and goods and services [4]. This report uses brand communication to understand Xiaomi's brand communication strategy in the market.

Experiential marketing consists of activities designed to immerse consumers in your brand via the stimulation of their senses, resulting in a favourable emotional connection to your firm [5]. This report uses experiential marketing to understand Xiaomi's brand communication strategy in product interaction design and after-sales service.

Fan economy is a way of operation for maximising the influence of word-of-mouth marketing by fostering customer loyalty and obtaining economic and social rewards [6]. This report uses fan economy to understand Xiaomi's brand communication strategy in the business activities of forum culture.

Product differentiation is a marketing approach that aims to differentiate a company's goods or services from those of its competitors. Successful product differentiation includes finding and articulating the distinctive aspects of a company's products while emphasising their distinctions from those of competitors [7]. This report uses product differentiation to understand Xiaomi's strategy in product positioning, professional photography marketing and pricing.

KOL, A key opinion leader is often characterised as a person who has increasingly accurate product knowledge, is accepted or trusted by relevant groups, and has a stronger effect on this group's purchasing behaviour. "The key opinion leader is an individual or organization with a relatively higher social status, who will listen to their suggestions and opinions when people make important decisions [8]. In this report, the KOL theory and fan economy are used to analyse the marketing of Xiaomi's Weibo campaign.

3. Methodology

Questionnaire survey method: Writer sent 1000 questionnaires to Xiaomi's customers according customer after-sales chat group, official MIUI forum, the effective questionnaires were 516. These questionnaires mainly covers the issues of Xiaomi product design, fan forum, product experience and mobile brand awareness. After the questionnaire data filtering, writer got their income and brand preference data, structure of Xiaomi target customer, people's evaluation of Xiaomi after-sales service and fans' forum experience, which helped writer to research this subject.

Literature research method: This paper have inquired many papers related to Xiaomi and smart phone brand strategy from CNKI, UEA digital library and MBAlib, including o2o, experiential marketing, fan economy, brand communication and brand equity theories, and some brand communication examples from Xiaomi, Xiaomi and vivo to help writer understand Xiaomi brand communication strategy.

Case study method: This research combined the Xiaomi fan forum example, sales data in the past five years, negative and proof news, and brand related theories to analyze the effectiveness of Xiaomi's brand communication strategy for Xiaomi.

Inductive summary: Through observation and synthesis of many Xiaomi sales cases, to find common means of brand communication analysis and reasoning methods, to summarize Xiaomi fan forum related events, after-sales, product design. Combined with the concept of brand equity and

brand communication, this research gets the problems and benefits in the actual practice of Xiaomi brand communication strategy.

4. Xiaomi's Brand Image and Target Market

Since 2011, Xiaomi mobile phones have been a cost-effective brand image with low-priced, high-equipped products that are far below the pricing of their peers in the market and are often perceived by the public as "cheap, durable, low-end products". Since the launch of Xiaomi MIX in 2016, Xiaomi hopes to break the mass impression of low-end mobile phone brands, with the start of 2019, Xiaomi has given its low-priced product line to its sub-brand Redmi Mobile [9]. Xiaomi phones started to raise prices overall and started to differentiate its products for high-end customers to create a premium brand.

From Tencent Penguin Intelligence Research released the gender portrait of Xiaomi mobile phone users, male users occupy the dominant position, accounting for 61.8% of the proportion of Xiaomi, while female users occupy to 38%. From the age group, Xiaomi mobile phones are more popular among younger users, especially the proportion of users aged 19 and below reached 20.4% [10]. Through the Fig. 1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, 91.67% of the people are under 40 years old, the customer group is mainly young people. Also 87.79% of the people will choose a mobile phone with a price below 4000 RMB. Most of these users are student groups who like to play games and surf the Internet, and with limited budgets (73.84% of customers' monthly income under 5000RMB, approximately \$714), they will most likely give priority to buying Xiaomi mobile phones with higher cost performance.

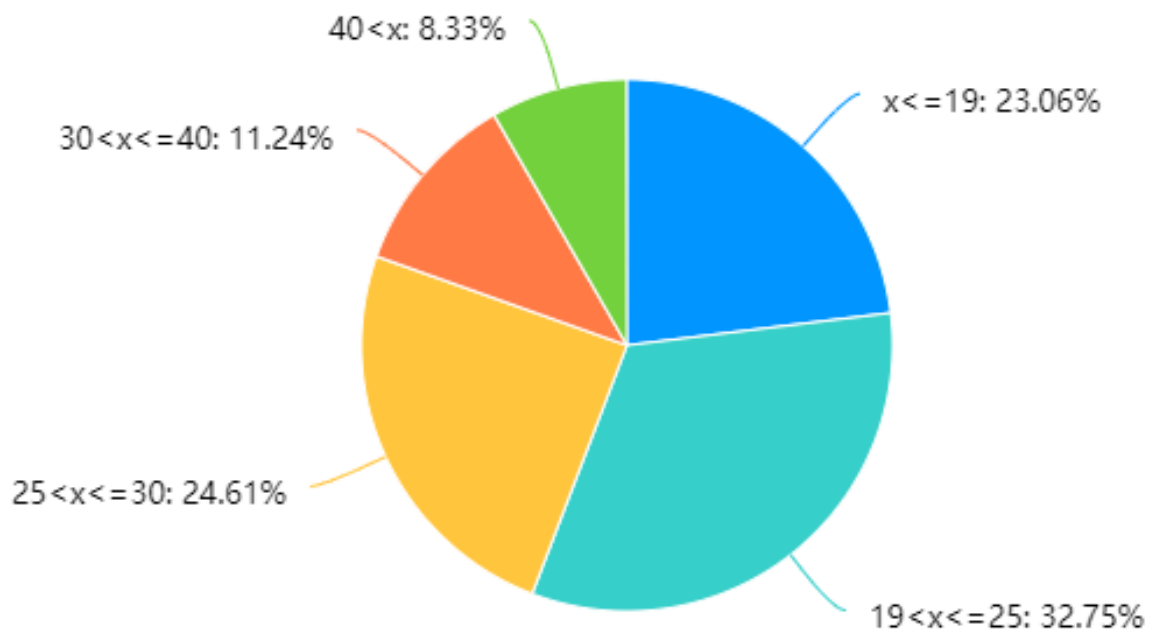


Fig. 1 Age of Xiaomi users (Photo credit: Original)

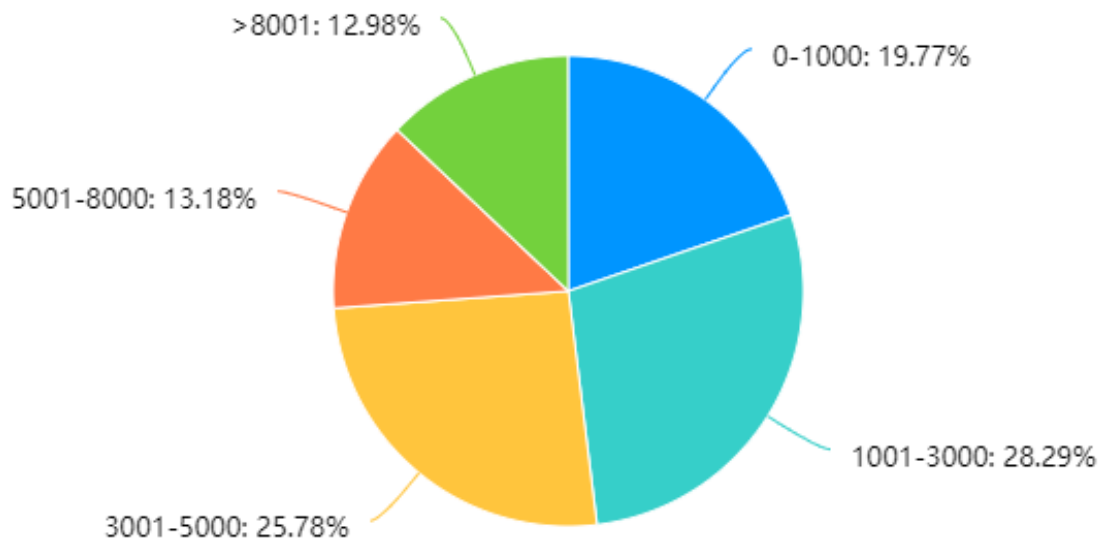


Fig. 2 Monthly income level of Xiaomi users (RMB) (Photo credit: Original)

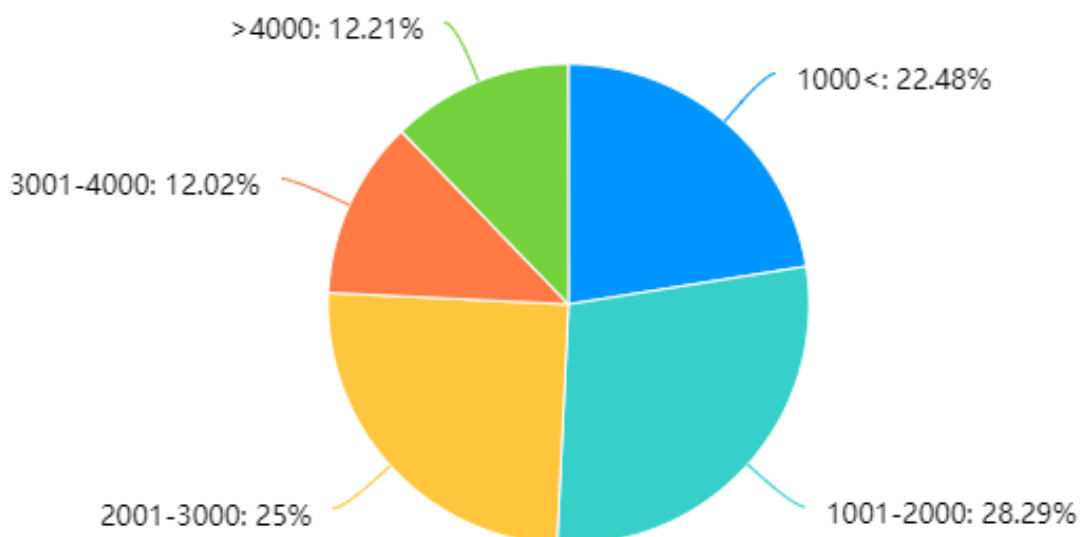


Fig. 3 Level of price range Xiaomi users choose for your phone (RMB) (Photo credit: Original)

5. Brand Communication Strategy of Fan Economy Marketing

5.1 Brand Strategy of Experience Marketing

Experience marketing is a new type of marketing accompanying with the experience economy. It focuses on the participation and involvement of consumers [11]. As an advanced way of marketing, experience marketing can be integrated with products and services, to become the core competence for marketing of a company.

5.1.1 Interactive experience marketing

The distance between Xiaomi and consumers can be narrowed with the interactive experience of the application of technology and the good service of offline stores. Xiaomi has its own set of operating system discussion forums(MIUI) where developers with experience in developing mobile phone operating systems will communicate directly with customers, for example, customers use features such as virtual positioning in gaming software, but in 2012 mobile phone operating systems did not yet have this feature, Xiaomi users put forward their needs within MIUI, there will be producers to tailor the system to the needs of customers Not only that, but the MIUI forum has remained highly active since the establishment of Xiaomi to gradually improve and upgrade the system according to the needs of different customers.

Consumers not only get a happy visual experience, but also feel the fun brought by Xiaomi products and the advantages of Xiaomi system, which is conducive to increase the customer's awareness of Xiaomi products and brands. What's more, with Fig. 4, more than 70.93% users think that the operating system of Xiaomi phones is above the level of not bad. because of the good interaction experience.

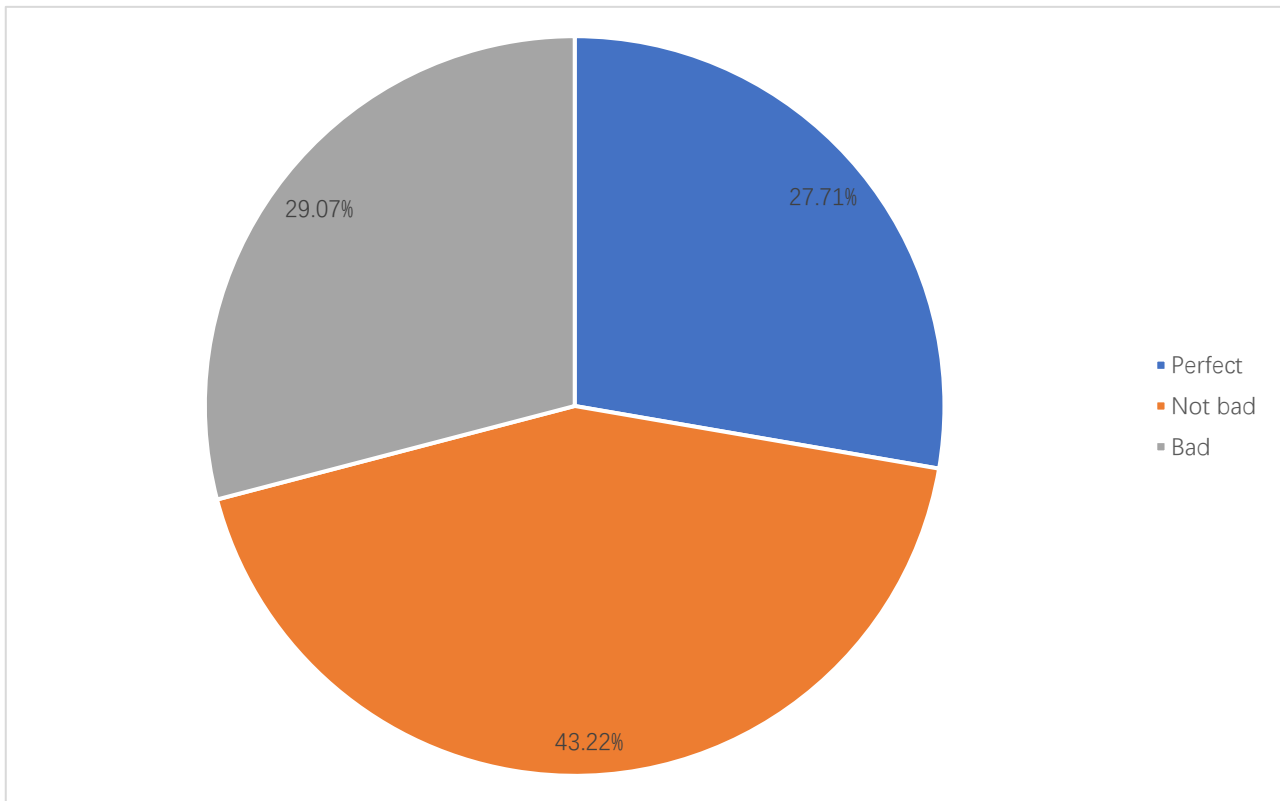


Fig. 4 Users think whether the operating system of Xiaomi mobile phone has brought them a good experience (Photo credit: Original)

5.1.2 Marketing strategy of online short video media

Positive reviews in social media campaigns have a positive effect on the purchase of mobile phones through customers [12]. As a result, Xiaomi has now produced several breakout videos and messages in online media marketing to gain a public exposure and has a dedicated online media team. He has created videos such as "Are you OK?", these video can get accumulated 200 million [13]. playback throughout the network, which have gained a lot of popularity on Chinese media such as Tiktok, Bilibili and Weibo. In addition to inspiring peer video creation, Xiaomi's leading Fig.s Lei Jun and Li Wanqiang have opened their own Weibo, and both have a huge fan base, such as Lei Jun's personal Weibo and Xiaomi's official Weibo, which have more than 20 million fans. At the beginning of March 2021, in order to promote and warm up the new product launch at the end of the month, Xiaomi use Weibo to publicize almost every day, successful use of the fan economy, public media campaigns to turn customers into a fan base for your brand. Increasing customer loyalty and the scale of brand advocacy.

Through Fig. 5, 64.92% of people think that the new media marketing has successfully attracted their attention, and not only that Xiaomi brand has gained a lot of exposure. Leverage the role of opinion leaders to expand the impact of marketing campaigns. Opinion leaders (KOLs), who exist between the communicator and the audience, are able to secondary process the communication message to reach the fans behind it [14]. Xiaomi has successfully leveraged the influence of opinion leaders in each market segment, allowing more audience groups to receive and remember or act on promotional messages, expanding the impact of the campaign in the market.

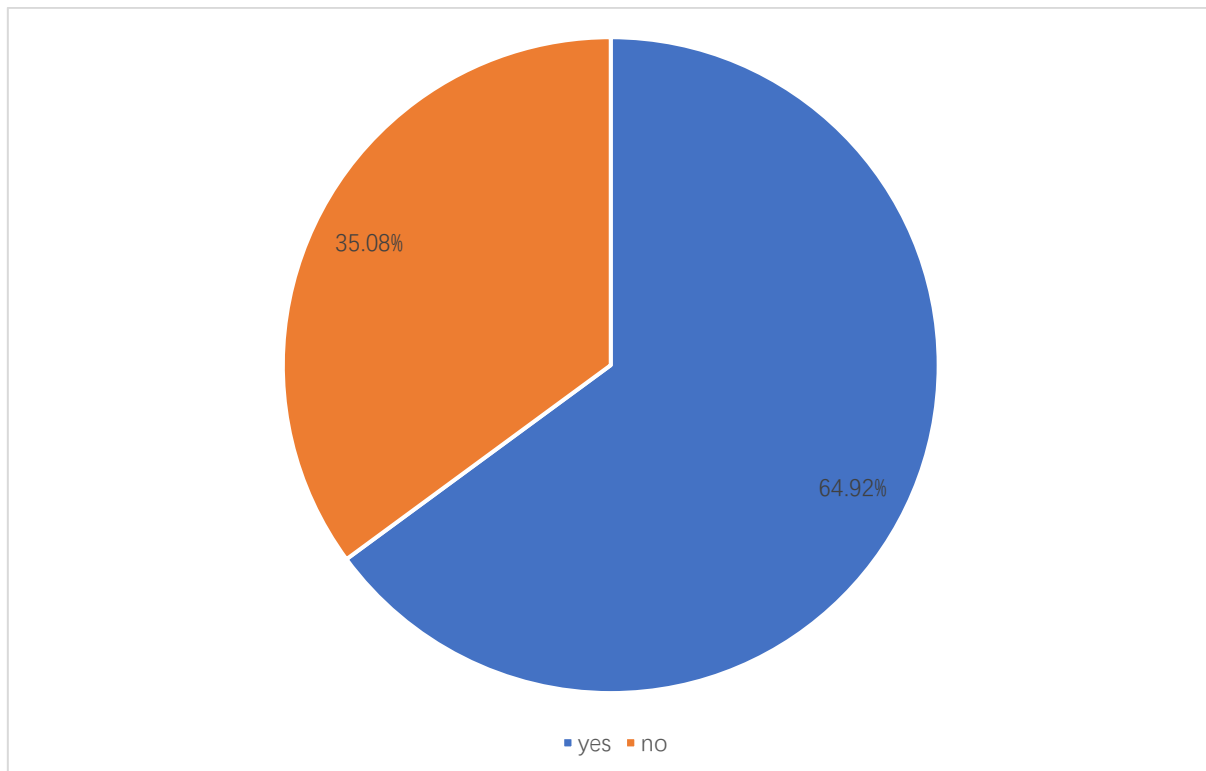


Fig. 5 Whether users have online media, such as Bilibili or Weibo, and are interested in Xiaomi when they see the information of Xiaomi's mobile phone (Photo credit: Original)

5.2 Strategy of Product Differentiation

5.2.1 Product function and positioning differentiation

The Xiaomi phones are mainly positioned as "Born to fever", the orientation direction is the direction of the pile, that means they assemble the parts with best performance together and make the product performance surplus, get a head start on product launches, under the signboard of high-configuration. Low price and high quality is the main impression that many users have of Xiaomi. In the early days, a large number of Xiaomi products into the sinking market. According to information published by Tencent News, Xiaomi Home has sunk to more than 2,200 counties across the country, county coverage has surged from 30% in 2012 to 80% in 2022 [15].

According to Table 1, almost 41.47% of people consider Xiaomi to be a high value for money brand, and even more 43.02% of Xiaomi users consider Xiaomi to be a low end brand, it proves that the long-term low-price strategy has made Xiaomi's low-end image deeply in customers' mind. As a result, Xiaomi CEO Lei Jun realised the problem and repeatedly emphasised the need for Xiaomi phones to hit the high end at the 2020 Xiaomi launch. Xiaomi has now made a segmentation of the market based on different customers on its official website, launching seven series in just three years, such as the CC series in charge of women's photography, the Black Shark series for mobile games, and even the high-end business folding phone Fold series against Samsung and other first-tier majors. And low-priced mobile phones rely on to the sub-brand Redmi mobile phone, Xiaomi brand across the board to raise the price of products.

Table 1. Brand impression of Xiaomi brings to you (Table credit: Original)

Type	Numbers	Proportion
Cheap and affordable	214	41.47%
Low-end	222	43.02%
Popular	34	6.59%
Highly configurable phones	34	6.59%
High-end	12	2.33%

On China's leading online e-commerce company Jingdong, Xiaomi's high-end gaming phone Black Shark series, with an average price of 4,000 yuan, won the annual e-commerce promotion on 6.18, "2021 Top 1 sales in the gaming phone category across all platforms" and even reached the level of sold out [16]. Nearly 10 million high-end smartphones, such as the Xiaomi 10 series and the Xiaomi 11, will be sold in 2020, with prices of RMB3,000 or over in mainland China and €300 or higher outside of China, will be sold globally [17]. Under Xiaomi's "dual-brand" strategy for its smartphone business, Xiaomi has made a comprehensive push into the high-end market, maintaining global shipment growth while increasing the competitiveness of its high-end products. This has led to a gradual change in customer perception of the Xiaomi brand. Through questionnaires and interviews, there are still some people who consider Xiaomi to be a high-end luxury mobile phone brand.

5.2.2 Unique Professional Photography marketing

In 2022, Xiaomi has partnered with Leica and also SONY to release the world's first Android phone with support for Dolby Vision HDR video capture and a 1-inch large base professional main camera with Leica professional optics. This was previously unheard of in the mobile phone market, and he sold out of stock within a month of its debut. At the time of its release, the Xiaomi 12S Ultra was the company's most popular device, selling 27,900 units; the Xiaomi 12S Pro came in second, selling 10,300 units; and the entry-level Xiaomi 12S sold the fewest, with 5,577 sales. On Chinese social media platforms Weibo and Bilibili, over 100 Certification digital bloggers called it the most powerful camera phone within this year.

The Fig. 6 shows that more than half of people believe that this product from Xiaomi meets the image of a premium phone. In the Table 2, the product reached 16.207 million hot degrees ranking first in the mobile phone list. The differentiated product for the unique segment has brought Xiaomi sales in addition to a new perception of the Xiaomi brand.

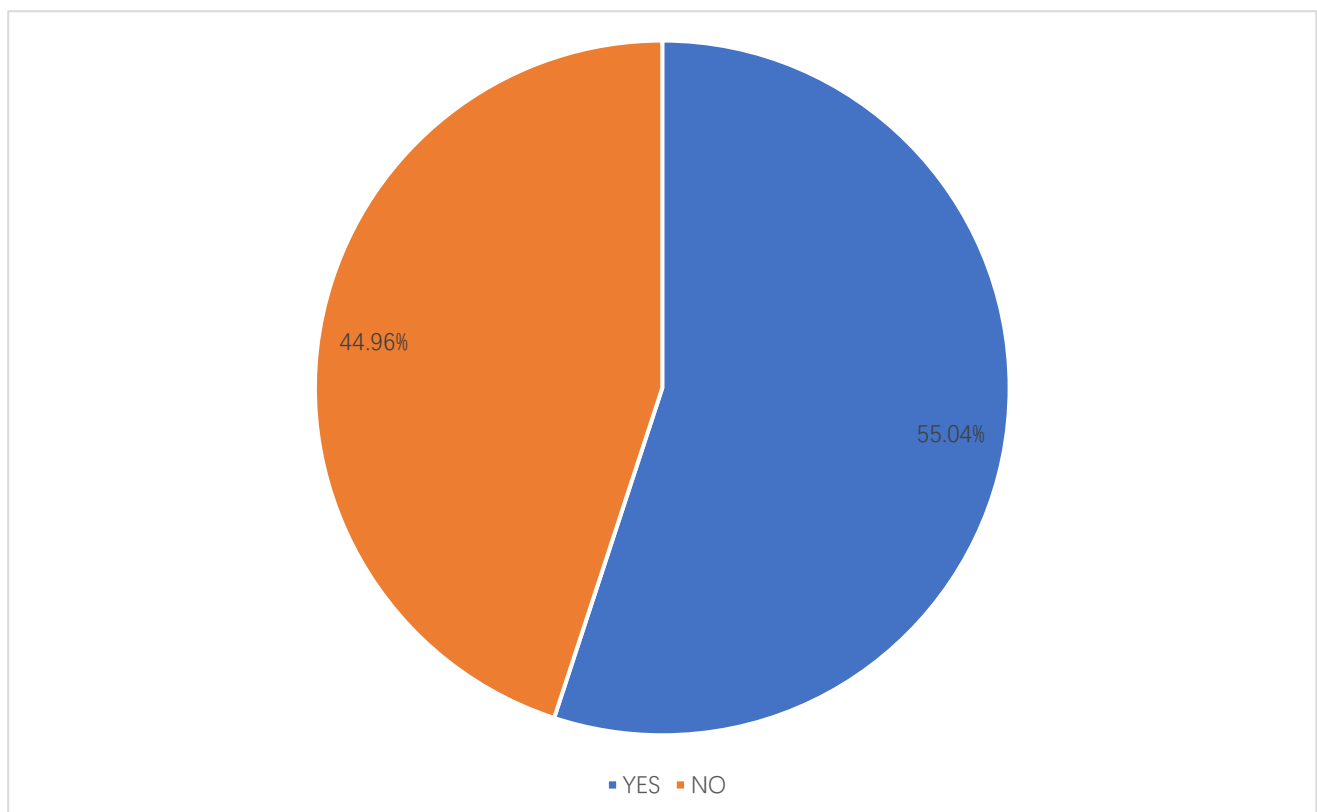


Fig. 6 Users believe that 12S Ultra meets the standard of high-end camera phones (Photo credit: Original)

Table 2. July 2022 Jingdong mobile phone hot list [18]

Product name	Ranking & Mark	Page views	Number of discussion posts
Xiaomi 12Ultra	1,9.7	16.207 million	16 thousands
Redmi K40	2,8.7	4.677 million	208 thousands
Xiaomi 11Ultra	3,8.6	4.210 million	129 thousands
Vivo X80	4,9.2	3.754 million	22 thousands
Redmi K50	4,9.2	3.691 million	8.4 thousands

5.3 Brand Equity Model

5.3.1 Awareness rate and familiarity

A brand must be known by consumers for its continuous existing in the market. The more consumers know about the brand, the more likely they are going to buy its products.

Generally speaking, Xiaomi's brand communication strategy was rather successful. It served the purpose to give Xiaomi a high degree of brand familiarity. A large number of people knew and understood the existence of Xiaomi as a brand among mobile phone manufacturers. No matter in the peak of Xiaomi sales in 2021, or in the subsequent decline, Xiaomi brand would appear in people's vision more or less. However, its influence and brand market are far less than those of Apple, Samsung and other companies that occupy the major mobile phone market share in China. Therefore, Xiaomi's popularity is relatively high, but it is lower than that of high-end mobiles international manufacturers.

A new product's initial lack of renown in the eyes of buyers was to be expected. Prompting will help customers recognize a brand if, after exposure to advertising and other forms of communication, just a hazy image of the brand remains in their minds. The next level involves spontaneous recall of the brand. Optimal brand awareness occurs when people are quick to identify and praise a brand while making purchases, since this indicates the brand has reached its full potential. While the premium Xiaomi brand has yet to gain traction, the company is well into the prompt-recognition phase of its development.

5.3.2 Brand awareness

Brand Awareness refers to customers' perceptions of a brand's overall quality. Function, qualities, dependability, durability, service, utility assessment, and the physical look of commodity quality are all connotations of this term. It serves as the foundation for brand differentiation, premium pricing, and brand expansion. According to research, customer endorsement of a brand's excellence will result in a substantial increase in market share and promising growth prospects.

Differentiation: it signifies the distinction between brands. This indicator's strength is directly proportional to the operational profit margin. The larger the difference, the smaller the degree of brand uniformity on the market, and the stronger the brand's negotiating strength. The distinction is represented not only in the product characteristics, but also in the brand image. Through the introduction of a sub-brand of high-end professional photography mobile phones by Xiaomi Including severe rivalry for crucial items with comparable price on the Xiaomi market. In terms of product distinction, Xiaomi's brand recognition is thus positive. Due of Xiaomi's great product distinction, it is simple to strengthen early impressions of the company.

Relevance: it indicates the brand's acceptability for customers, which is connected to market penetration. Strong brand relevance implies that the target audience accepts the brand image and the brand's promise, is willing to test the brand, and that the associated channel construction is more convenient. Whether it is system optimization for young people's use habits or short video media marketing that caters to the mobile phone use patterns of the present millennial generation, Xiaomi has a strong relevance in brand communication. Brand effectively markets and designs goods based on the functions and brand features of its target consumers. It fulfils the relevance between brand and

consumer, and this style of brand communication is appropriate for the customer's consumption idea, allowing consumers to see the relevance of the brand product concept.

Respect: it is a reflection of how people feel about the brand and how they perceive the brand to be. Trial purchases validate customers' preconceived notions about the brand, which in turn influences their opinions and, in turn, their likelihood to buy again and spread the word. Through Xiaomi's fan forum culture and fans' participation in brand design, and Xiaomi's development team actively communicates with customers to absorb customers' views on the brand. Customers are valued by Xiaomi, and their opinions are well received into the specific experience for products. After customers try to purchase, they find that the products meet the expectations of customers. It will confirm the customer's expectations, give praise, good experience stimulation continue to participate in design, consumption, praise. Virtuous circle promotes word-of-mouth communication, and Xiaomi brand communication is dignified.

Awareness: it is a representation of the customers' knowledge of the brand, which is tied to the breadth of their experience as consumers. Learn about online shopping, offline store after-sales and free service experience, forum interaction, advertising, webpage games. As well as Xiaomi brand communication experience strategy. The high-depth and complete experience enables customers to have a good understanding of the product. They feel that Xiaomi system design interaction and fans' participation in design are the characteristics of the brand. They gradually recognize when they participate in the product interaction, and there is a high degree of respect and relevance for customers, which is not good in product differences. However, the overall existence of brand products makes customers pay attention to Xiaomi's characteristics, which enables customers to pay attention to Xiaomi's characteristics. Customers recognize Xiaomi as a good brand.

5.3.3 Brand association

This metric shows how likely it is that customers will have a personal connection to a brand, or how well they see the brand fitting into their own lives.

When customers want to buy products with high cost performance, the first consideration is the mobile phone brands with good reputation and low prices on the market, including Red Rice, Glory, Xiaomi, etc. Because of the penetration pricing, customers may think of Xiaomi very well. Xiaomi has a strong association with high cost performance brands, so it may be some obstacles to its impact on transformation of high-end brands.

5.3.4 Brand loyalty

For consumers who are familiar with a certain brand, the reputation of the brand can be calculated by comprehensively evaluating the quality and identity. According to big data of Weibo, including fans forum, Xiaomi's customers have extremely high brand loyalty. Before the problems of Xiaomi's MIUI system and product planning occur in 2020, no matter the annual replacement of Xiaomi's phones or insist on providing opinions on upgrading in the old fans forum, both can prove that Xiaomi fans have extremely high loyalty.

5.3.5 Brand equity

Its broad appeal, high product quality that meets or exceeds customer expectations, favourable brand relevance, and steady and devoted clientele are the four main benefits it has brought to the market. Therefore, Xiaomi's brand equity is valuable. Brand equity score is used to evaluate the comprehensive performance of different brands in awareness rate, familiarity, perceived quality and identification. Xiaomi has a very high degree of awareness among the people who know it, including its unique fans culture, which enables Xiaomi to have high customer loyalty. However, due to the strong experience effect and short-video marketing, Xiaomi's brand has a good correlation with the target customers and a high degree of brand association. Therefore, Xiaomi's overall brand communication strategy enables Xiaomi to complete the process from information transmission to deepening customer impression and building loyal customer groups.

6. Recommendation and Conclusion

6.1 Shortcomings in Strategy

6.1.1 Low-end products branding

According to the Fig. 8, 55.23% of 516 valid questionnaires believed that Xiaomi was not a high-end brand. This is related to the reason why Xiaomi's low price has sunk into the market all the year round. Not only that, in recent years, the mobile phone operating system BUG has also brought a lot of bad experiences to consumers. On the video website Bilibili, the negative evaluation video about Xiaomi's mobile phone operating system has reached 2.4 million broadcasts. Even at Xiaomi's product launches in 2021 and 2022, Jin Fan, the system development manager, took the initiative to apologize, does not change consumers' aversion to it which has brought a huge resistance to Xiaomi's transformation to high-end mobile phone brands and a negative impact on Xiaomi's brand building. Xiaomi has to concentrate its efforts to mobile phone system development if it wants its mobile phones to be competitive with similar items on the market.

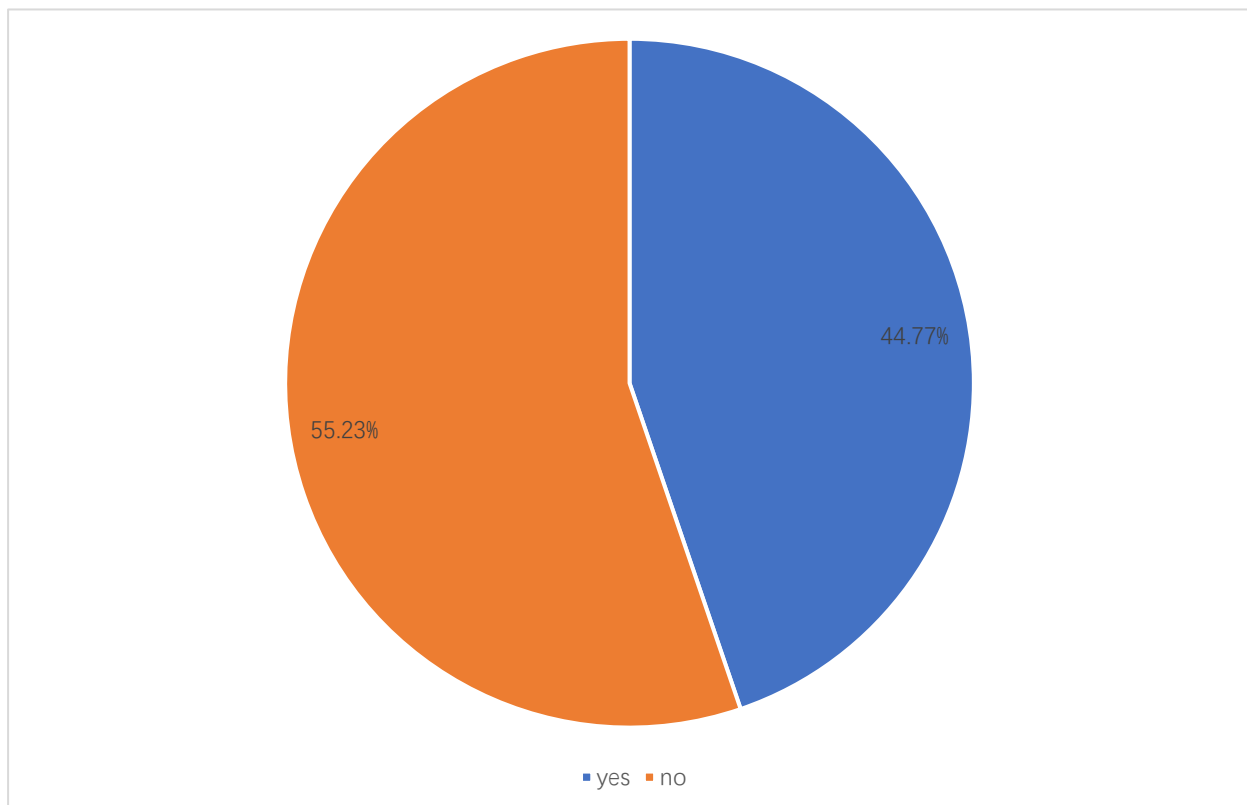


Fig. 8 Whether users think Xiaomi is a high-end mobile phone (Photo credit: Original)

6.1.2 Product design plagiarism

Xiaomi's product campaign image in Spain has been accused of plagiarism, with a composition and colour scheme that resembles the work of Peter Tarka. The allegedly plagiarised poster originated from Polish designer Peter Tarka, whose many designs have been published in magazines and on websites. It is understood that Peter Tarka created the artwork a year ago, and the author said that Xiaomi had not received prior authorization [19]. Copying from the original brand will certainly cause confusion in the market and affect the reputation of the brand, and more seriously, it will destroy Xiaomi's own design capabilities, which may result in consumer rejection or even legal sanctions, which is not worth the loss. Xiaomi should have promptly pulled the design in question and used PR to deal with it to ensure that it would not happen to the design team in the future.

6.2 Summary

This paper analyzes Xiaomi's brand communication strategy from three aspects: Xiaomi's experience marketing strategy, product differentiation strategy and fan culture marketing strategy. Combined with specific data and questionnaire results, the effect of brand communication strategy is reflected in experience marketing, good interactive experience and early after-sales service of customers. In terms of fan culture, a good fan forum environment makes a large number of users willing to continue to use Xiaomi forum and Xiaomi products for communication. In product differentiation, the unique audio marketing attracts customers, but in terms of pricing and functional differences, the market has many substitutes and the differentiation effect is not good. The target customer position of Xiaomi brand is clear, and the brand information is clear, but there are false propaganda problems. Before 2017, the brand interacted well through the forum culture, and there was negative word-of-mouth in the later stage due to poor management. Overall, the brand communication of Xiaomi leads to the medium brand awareness, high brand relevance, good brand cognition effect, high brand loyalty, high customer esteem and poor brand difference in the market. To summary, the brand equity of Xiaomi is high.

7. Limitations and Further Study

Firstly, in the international business analysis report, there are few articles about millet brand analysis. Therefore, most of the data need to be obtained from many financial reports and business news. Writer hopes to have a deeper understanding of the data in the future. Secondly, although the questionnaires and interviews were conducted for Xiaomi users, the data sample was very small compared to its total sales and having more comprehensive big data statistics in the future would greatly improve the data validity of the report.

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