

The Path and Value of User Participation Construction in Brand New Media Marketing

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Abstract. Under the Internet communication ecology, the number of China's self-media has exploded, and enterprises have built their social accounts to form brand marketing, which has become a communication force that cannot be ignored. Nowadays, under the leadership of the chairman Dong Mingzhu, the national home appliance manufacturing brand "Gree Electric" has firmly grasped the new media operation, and successfully created online marketing with both sales and word-of-mouth. This paper takes the operation strategy of the Weibo account "Dong Mingzhu's Self-Media" as an example, analyzes the content, data and cases to conclude the reasons for its success, and tries to explore the build path and value of the sense of user participation, to provide a certain reference for the new media operation of China's enterprises.

Keywords: Dong Mingzhu; Brand Marketing; New Media Operation; User Participation; Personal Branding.

1. Introduction

In May 2015, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang signed and approved the "Made in China 2025" initiative, which is the first ten-year action plan for China to implement the "Manufacturing Power Strategy"[1]. The three major transformations from "made in China" to "created in China", from "speed in China" to "quality in China", and from "products in China" to "brands in China" [2], strive to create a grand layout of national brands to build a powerful country in science and technology, and promote enterprises to rely on independent research and innovation capabilities to "go out".

In 2016, as the Chairman and President, Dong Mingzhu first put forward the slogan "Let the world fall in love with Made in China", and led Gree Electric Appliances, Inc. (Gree) to break through the original bottleneck, to show the strong independent innovation strength with practical data, and to make a unique contribution to shining the national brand on the world stage.

At the same time, with the rapid development of the Internet economy and online consumption, Weibo and WeChat have been becoming new media platforms for gathering young users. The new trend of entrepreneurial image construction in the context of social media is the change from rational to emotional appeal, from passive indoctrination to active exploration, and from serious to entertainment image [3]. Based on the above, Gree has successfully created a user-centred operation model through the corporate news, product promotion, value transfer and current affairs participation released by the Weibo account "Dong Mingzhu Self-Media", allowing more young users to know, recognize and identify Gree. The creation of this model not only explores a new dissemination way in parallel with traditional and new media, creates good social value and economic benefits for enterprises, but also supports national brands to enhance their popularity and influence in the world. The establishment of a positive image of China's science and technology power has had a positive impact and is worth analyzing and studying.

Therefore, this paper takes the Weibo account "Dong Mingzhu Self-Media" as the main research object, and takes the content from Jan 1st to June 30th 2021 as the timeline, to analyze the build path and value of user participation in brand new media marketing.

2. The Path of User Participation Construction in New Media Operations

2.1 Open Participation

The ability of enterprises to acquire users on new media platforms largely depends on the independent space shaped by their content. Gree chooses to establish the general tone of new media with Dong Mingzhu's IP and internet celebrities:

The former mainly refers to the accumulation of entrepreneurs' fan community organizations in the form of interaction, relying on the natural relationship with enterprises to increase the credibility, and completes the value transformation and realization from entrepreneurs to brands [4];

The latter refers to striving to use youthful and modern management for brand marketing, such as posting videos to increase exposure, moving closer to the live broadcast economy, etc.

In terms of content presentation, Gree's Weibo account involves many fields including daily operations, corporate dynamics, hotspots, value promotion, etc. In terms of building a sense of participation, it adopts an open and inclusive attitude and welcomes interactive discussions to narrow the psychological distance between producers and users. It can be seen that Gree hopes to take a multi-pronged approach to further open up a new situation in the new media operation as well as the enterprise development.

2.1.1 Content Originality

On social platforms with rich content and frequent hot spots, users' attention is often unable to stay on a single account for a long time, so quality is the guarantee for an account to be recognized. Games, likes-collecting, lottery and other easy interactions with a high degree of participation - although they can gain huge traffic inclination in a short time, these activities are only icing on the cake and cannot become the foundation of the account. Only highly original content, with great visual impact and people's livelihood theme, can win the bargaining chip.

In June 2021, "Dong Mingzhu's Self-Media" released original topics #Gree allots houses to per employee#, #Gree's first batch of housing is about to be delivered#. Once these topics were published, her account quickly gained more than 10,000 likes from users and attracted more than 3,000 comments and reposts. The reason was precise because Gree had noticed the current social problems of high housing prices and difficulty in buying a house in China, and the enterprise did not choose a "low-cost but glamorous" bonus but implemented a "high-cost but unpretentious" housing. This measure effectively improved both the enthusiasm and cohesion of employees; it also established Gree's positive image of "thinking about what employees think, worrying about what employees need" for society. In the long run, this real action and media marketing will be beneficial to talent recruitment and the overall social status improvement of enterprises.

2.1.2 Operational Balance

The Weibo account "Dong Mingzhu Self-Media" is still a window for enterprises, and it needs to undertake the heavy responsibility of corporate publicity. Therefore, continuous commercial promotion is unavoidable. However, if the account wants to maintain a long-term sticky relationship with users, it also needs to keep a certain level of daily operation and maintenance. The release of daily content often does not involve utilitarian purposes, but only plays the role of maintaining an emotional connection with the corresponding community and balancing the commercial atmosphere.

For example, during the national college entrance examination in June 2021, Dong posted a long article on Weibo, expressing the blessing to the students for a bright future, the gratitude to the staff preparing for the test, and the cherishing of the century-old history of CPC. The full text was described in the first-person tone, with sincere words and emotions, just like a warm and cordial elder's expectation for the younger generation. "The college entrance examination is just an exhibition of the achievements of your hardworking for more than ten years. It is not a farewell ceremony for your study and struggle. It is a new starting point to write magnificent poems in the future." [5] The interaction of this real scene quickly narrowed the psychological distance between readers and Dong, which not only aroused the blessings in the comment area but also received praise from different age

groups such as the parents of the students. The hot comments like "As expected of Ms. Dong" and "She is indeed a cultural person" showed the success of this emotional operation.

2.1.3 Utilize Situation

Since Dong's popularity was increasing, her IP has closely matched Gree's brand image, and her behaviour on public occasions will also be regarded as Gree's core behaviour. Therefore, to create a benign and upward corporate culture, increase the consumption affinity of national local brands, and present to the public a corporate image that strives to practice "Made in China" and pays attention to social hotspots, it is essential and indispensable to present to the public a corporate image as well as an entrepreneur image that is grateful, sincere and practical.

During the National Two Sessions in March 2021, Dong's account launched an original entry #*"Mingzhu" Express in Two Sessions*#. By publishing "implement Chinese standards higher than international ones to improve domestic market access", "raise the tax threshold to 10,000 yuan" and other proposals, it not only released to the public a signal of the strong follow-up potential of Gree's independent innovation but also let consumers see that Gree, as a national brand, pays attention to people's livelihood issues and undertakes social responsibilities for enterprises.

2.1.4 Cooperate Cross-Borders

In the early period of establishing the self-media account, Dong's branding was limited to product advertisements and topical events, so the communication mode was relatively simple, and the content was boring too. However, now she uses new media platforms to achieve cross-border cooperation. "Gree National Tour Live Broadcast" in March 2021 broke through the new marketing model, and the workplace variety show "New Comers" that Dong participated in in April 2021 completely refreshed the public's established ideas of traditional Chinese manufacturing propaganda.

Mango TV's self-made workplace show "New Comers" was a perfect marketing case. By setting up Dong's interviews, assessments and observations of newcomers, the show silently conveyed Gree's corporate culture, employment philosophy and salary treatment to the audience. Meanwhile, the show also used multi hot topics, including #*How to view the gender differences can solve workplace problems*#, #*Assessing workers' ability depends on the results or the process*#, #*How to deal with improper means in the workplace*# and other entries, to hit the current pain points of labourers. While participating in the topic discussion, the audience also changed their perception of Dong's management style and Gree's brand image.

2.2 Design Interaction

User participation is the primary feature of the Marketing 3.0 Era, because the information circulating in the market is no longer determined and controlled by the enterprise alone, but is jointly provided by the enterprise and consumers [6]. This requires enterprises to establish the core concept of "user-centred", not only thinking about what users urgently want and need but also incorporating users into the entire chain of production, marketing and communication so that users can change from simple to productive consumers.

2.2.1 Novel Interaction

The existing ways to enhance users' sense of participation like lottery more or less leave users with the commercialized perception that the operator is the brand side. While Gree's regular interactions are posted on the official Weibo account, Dong's self-media adopts a Wechat Moment style. That is, she gives daily attention to national current affairs and social public opinion, etc., and occasionally likes the content of the official account. This novel interaction method seems to be superfluous, but given the platform attributes of Weibo, the account communication effect will be presented to fans, so this kind of operation has a personal grounded image that has stripped commercial attributes and drawn in the psychological distance. Therefore, it is not uncommon for ordinary users of Weibo to directly exchange comments on the recent status of Gree products and employment standards under Dong's account.

2.2.2 Interesting Design

Setting a reward mechanism is a common method in digital marketing, and the innovative application of "Dong Mingzhu Self-Media" is that it combines corporate promotion incentives with the audience's emotional experience, which is good at using the star effect to focus on users' curiosity and warm feelings, instead of splitting the link between promotional content and audience sentiment. For example, Dong was invited to participate in "New Comers" and took a photo with Yue Yunpeng, a famous crosstalk comedian in China. This incident itself is not novel, but Yue's comment and Dong's reposting accidentally created a comedy effect. "We have some similarities, is it because of the face shape?" "Are you performing crosstalk?" The interesting design of the two stars' "commercial boosting" made the audience smile, and the ingenuity of the group photo with emojis not only increased the show's exposure but also deepened the users' emotional interaction experience. The content had more than 7,000 likes, which is enough to prove the uniqueness of this marketing.

2.3 Value Word of Mouth

No matter how the Internet economy evolves, there are important rules for the new media operation to create distinctive image features and vertical behaviour labels and seize the audience's scarce attention resources [7]. Meanwhile, under the tide of the Internet economy, the breadth and objectivity of information sources make word-of-mouth information more acceptable. Enterprises pay attention to consumer word-of-mouth, which can greatly improve real-time marketing efficiency.

2.3.1 Crisis of Public Opinion

In September 2020, the two brands, Aux and Gree, sued each other for the patent technology disputes in 2018, which caused social concern for a while. Gree attached great importance to this and responded quickly. The enterprise issued a clarification statement, which was concise and coherent, two days after the date of the trial by the Supreme People's Court. First, it listed the corresponding measures of the two enterprises at several key nodes between 2018 and 2020 logically and clearly, to facilitate the audience to understand the incident; secondly, it emphasized the protection of intellectual property rights by the state and the desire for integrity management by the home appliance market, which quickly occupied the high ground of morality and public opinion; finally, the visual impact brought by the data to the audience was used to minimize the negative impact of this dispute on the enterprise.

As expected, while seeing the statement "Gree sued Aux for patent infringement on 20 products", "Aux has been sentenced to 27 fines for infringing Gree's patent rights between 2017 and 2020", etc., the audience have viciously expressed disappointment and indignation, and also strongly supported Gree's positive behaviour of insisting on independent research and development technology, as well as promoting "Made in China". It is precisely because of the focus on the word of mouth that Gree was able to retreat from this public opinion incident and even turned the crisis into an opportunity to gain the recognition of consumers.

2.3.2 Create opinion leaders

In consumer science, an opinion leader is someone who filters, interprets or provides information to others. Undoubtedly, opinion leaders in the mass media voice field often firmly control the media discourse power in the public opinion field; and in the era of the Internet economy, they are also the most potential stocks in traffic realization. As far as Gree is concerned, Dong Mingzhu has already become a representative opinion leader of its corporate trends.

As early as March 2019, Dong officially introduced "Dong Mingzhu's Self-Media" to the outside world in Beijing. She said in an interview that the establishment of this account was mainly for the exchange of Chinese entrepreneurs through network connections to provide a platform to make a modest contribution to "Let the world fall in love with Made in China". In May 2019, she held the first lecture at the long-awaited "Mingzhu Academy" in Guangzhou, which was later understood by the society as Gree's exploration of personal feelings and "Made in China". Judging from the price range of 980 yuan (about 145 U.S. dollars) to 3880 yuan per person for tickets at that time, there were

already more than 1-million-yuan economic benefits behind a lecture with a scale of about 1,000 people. It is not difficult to see how successful Gree is in shaping opinion leaders.

3. The Value of User Participation Construction in New Media Operation

As the direct window of enterprises and customers, the new media is characterized by strong interactivity. The pioneer has built a recognizable personal brand and successfully transformed it into commercial value, leading the latecomers to pay more attention to the creation and management of personal brands.[8] To achieve the ultimate goal and obtain commercial benefits, enterprises need to make full use of user feedback brought by the two-way communication in their participation, to understand as much as possible the needs and experiences of customers, which will complete the transition from "enterprise-centric" to "user-centric".

3.1 Personalization to Meet Various Needs

The audience is the market. Internet users grow up in the era of digital media, and anonymity in the public opinion field makes them more willing to boldly express their preferences. Gree and Dong Mingzhu have followed this trend and are determined to create personalized marketing and operations that are more in line with the current consuming trend.

As early as 2007, Gree developed the awareness of group division based on the age of the audience and tried to launch customized products to meet the differentiated needs, such as "Sleep Air Conditioner" to improve the sleeping environment, "Smart Bird" and "Xin Tian Weng" air conditioner specially designed for the children and the elderly. The so-called "people who win the hearts of the people win the world". It is foreseeable that an enterprise, which always adheres to relying on technology and is guided by consumer demand, will have a bright future.

3.2 Rejuvenation of Brand Image

Gree was founded in 1985. As a representative of China's traditional manufacturing industry, if it was self-contained and immutable, it would inevitably face the risk of an ageing brand image under the impact of the Internet industry. Dong Mingzhu realized this very early.

Whether it is the lyrics of "Good Air Conditioner, Made by Gree" in the original RAP song in 2019, the popular "Gree Bubble House" in Beijing, or trying to build pop-up stores "G Secret Office" in Nanjing and Shanghai, and the Tik-Tok Challenge "The Air Is Good at Home" in 2022... Everything indicates that Gree has already entered the stage of multi-form, multi-platform and multi-functional integrated marketing.

In addition, the image construction of female entrepreneurs and fan marketing should also be paid attention to. The new trend of entrepreneur image construction in the context of social media is the change from the altar to individual icon, from serious to entertainment image. [9]

A younger and more feminine deployment of Gree's innovative use of "Internet +" is also an expression of an old-fashioned national enterprise actively catering to the entertainment-oriented way of life in the Internet age. It also means that Gree is willing to give more media voice to young groups, to strive for its emotional identity and active interaction.

3.3 Integration of Publicity Resources

In the fragmented-and-decentralized-information world, new media operations have broken the inherent time and space limitations of traditional models, effectively integrating the needs of scattered users. It improves the speed and depth of information flow between enterprises and users and creates a new communication ecology of deep content cultivation and the publicity matrix.

Gree's new media operation on Weibo is generally based on the official and Dong's accounts as two lines in parallel. Meanwhile, there are various columns including "Good Products Recommendation", "Ms. Dong's News" and "Mingzhu Academy" on the WeChat side, supplemented by the new gameplay of the e-commerce and short video platforms. The intention is to segment

audience tags through user feedback on different platforms and find a dynamic balance between demand and supply, which actively integrates various publicity elements to form a new media publicity matrix and improve the self-regulation and self-renewal of the enterprise's new media system.

4. Summary

With the continuous upgrading of China's business model, more and more users tend to choose online shopping and value the quality of life, which has also spawned a new exploration of enterprises trying to cooperate with e-commerce platforms. For brands, building a sense of user participation and engagement is a process of summarizing previous data and exploring future directions. The information summarization enables enterprises to gradually shift from pure content producers to interactive system builders, and it also enables users to spontaneously discover the value growth points of enterprises, which promotes the continuous operation of the interactive chain between enterprises and users. From this point of view, users are the main force in the branding effect of enterprises. Thus, it is hoped that more local Chinese enterprises can follow the new media operation strategy of Gree and continue to write a beautiful chapter of "Made in China" in the future.

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