

Chinese Milk Goes Global: Analysis on Sports Marketing of “Mengniu” Brand

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Abstract

After two consecutive World Cups in 2018 and 2022, Mengniu has gained a certain degree of popularity around the world through successful sports marketing. The article selects the brand Mengniu as a typical case, using case analysis method and SWOT analysis method to analyze in detail the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Mengniu in the sports marketing environment. Also, focus on the globalization of brands and products, and strive to have a clear and accurate understanding of the actual situation of brand development, so as to provide a foundation for the brand's future sports marketing and global development.

Keywords

“Mengniu” Brand; Sports Marketing; SWOT Analysis; Globalization.

1. Brand Introduction

Mengniu Dairy Co., Ltd. was established in 1999 and is currently a Sino-foreign joint venture headquartered in Hohhot. As of 2009, it has total assets of more than 30 billion yuan, nearly 30,000 employees, and an annual dairy production capacity of 6 million tons. As of 2020, including the Helin base, Mengniu Dairy Group has established 41 production bases across the country, with more than 400 items in five series: liquid milk, yogurt, ice cream, dairy products and cheese. It owns Deluxe Milk, Chunzhen, Youyi C, Shiny Meadow, Weilaixing, Guanyi Milk, Mengniu Sour Yogurt, Tilan Shengxue, Ruibun, Bellamy's, Milk Ground, Arla and other star brands. Its products cover the domestic market and are exported to Mongolia, Southeast Asia, the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, Macao and other countries and regions(Huixuan 2012). Mengniu is China's leading dairy supplier, one of the top eight dairy companies in the world, a key national agricultural industrialization enterprise, and a leading company in the dairy industry.

As early as 2006, Mengniu formally formed a strategic partnership with CCTV5 and exclusively named the large-scale sports program "Between Cities", which launched Mengniu's sports marketing. Also in 2006, Mengniu began cooperation with the NBA, a world-renowned professional league. In 2018 and 2022, it became the global official sponsor of two consecutive FIFA Men's Football World Cups, and achieved the Grand Slam of top sports flow including the Chinese Women's Football Team, Gu Ailing, Mbappe, Messi, etc. Through successful sports marketing, Mengniu has expanded the influence of its products, corporate culture and brand value, and gradually moved towards globalization. Therefore, this successful sports marketing case deserves in-depth analysis and thinking.

2. Combining SWOT with Brands Analysis

SWOT is a popular strategic planning tool used by organizations to critically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats in their environment (Dyson Citation 2004). Strengths and weaknesses are “internal” elements while opportunities and threats are “external” . A SWOT analysis provides a framework of how an organization's

internal qualities, which are within control, (mis)align with uncontrollable external realities (Gürel and Tat Citation 2017). Respondents are usually asked to list relevant points under each of the four elements and discuss them to discern emergent themes and formulate concrete actions (Chermack and Kasshanna Citation 2007). Using SWOT analysis method, the article analyzes Mengniu's sports marketing, focusing on the impact of sports marketing on brand influence and global development, and elaborating on the brand's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in this development process.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case Analysis

The case analysis method refers to a research method that extracts abstract rules and derives corresponding theories by analyzing typical cases in social life (Zhao Yonghua, Mao Xue, Dou Shuqi 2023). The article selects Mengniu as a specific case to examine and analyze its sports marketing, including text content analysis of a large amount of text materials related to brand development, and visual analysis of Mengniu's advertisements, related pictures and videos.

3.2. SWOT Analysis

Based on the collection and analysis of relevant data, SWOT analysis method was used to analyze the Mengniu brand sports marketing environment from four aspects: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in order to obtain an accurate understanding of the actual situation of brand development. This will then provide a basis for formulating future development strategies for the brand.

4. Results and Discussion

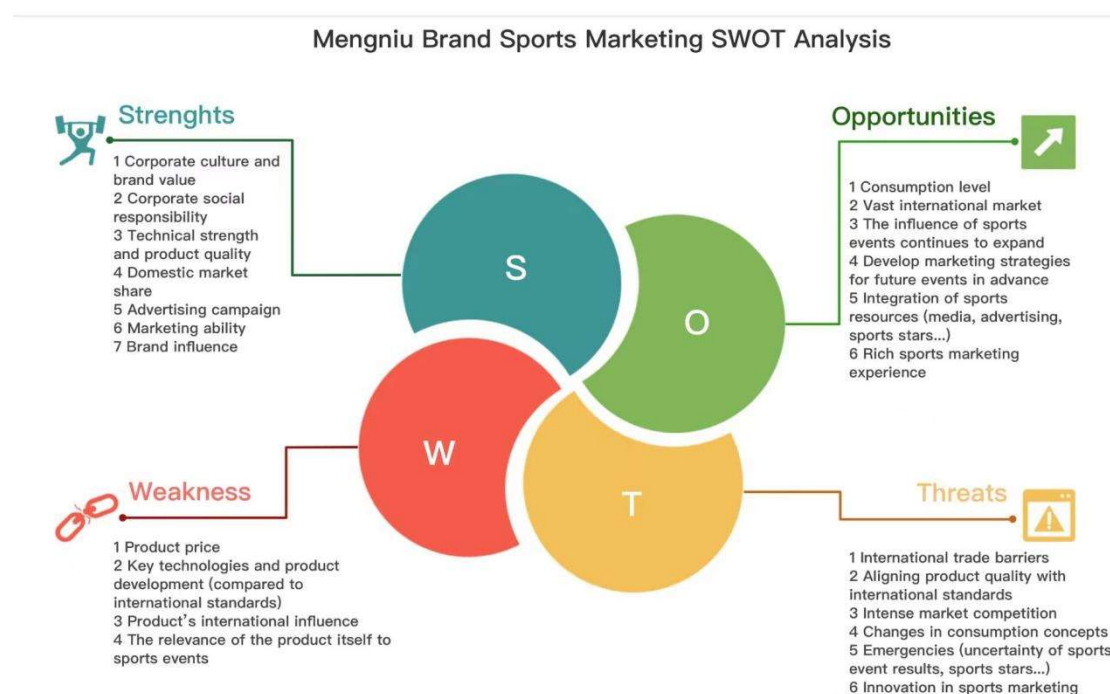


Figure 1. SWOT analysis of Mengniu brand

4.1. Strengths: Brand Value, Advertising and Marketing

In terms of brand sports marketing, Mengniu has many strengths. For Mengniu, the connotation of "born to be strong" contained in its brand is the hard-core gene that enables it to break into the top ten dairy companies in the world from a corner of Inner Mongolia. The positive attributes of sports competitions are naturally attractive to Mengniu's brand philosophy. From

the communication theme layout of the 2018 World Cup "natural force, born to be strong", to the further strengthening of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics "let the world see that we must be strong", to the layout of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics "burning the ice and snow, we must strengthen China". As a sponsor of the 2022 Qatar World Cup, Mengniu has achieved a grand slam of the world's top sports IPs such as Gu Ailing, Chinese Women's Football Team, Kylian Mbappe, Messi, and the World Cup.

In the layout of sports marketing, Mengniu does not just "find whoever is popular", but focuses on discovering potential players with the qualities of "breakthroughs, unwillingness to admit defeat, and enterprising". Through the high degree of fit between the spirits and qualities of both parties, Mengniu interprets its "born to be strong" Spirit. Unlike other brands that gathered to announce official endorsements when Gu Ailing became popular, Mengniu took a fancy to Gu Ailing's "naturally strong" spiritual traits such as challenging herself and breaking through before she became famous. Mengniu took the lead in partnering with Gu Ailing in 2019. The cooperation with the Chinese women's football team is based on the rise of female power. From breakthroughs in adversity to returning to the top of Asia, the perseverance of the women's football girls perfectly fits the core connotation of the Mengniu brand.

In the promotion and marketing of brand spokespersons, Mengniu pays more attention to the interpretation of characters. Just like the football superstar Messi, who was selected by Mengniu in 2018, Mengniu tells the story of Messi's experience-as a patient with dwarfism, he relied on growth hormone injections to get to where he is today step by step. But in the quarter-finals of the 2018 World Cup, Messi's Argentina team was eliminated. However, from "natural force, born to be strong" to "I am not born strong, I am just born to be strong", the brand insists on carving quality step by step rather than worrying about success or failure. At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Mengniu and Messi set out again, once again demonstrating their persistence and response to the strong spirit. At the same time, Mbappe's story also brings everyone a new force that is not afraid of the strong and breaks through the ground. At a time when everyone is lamenting the twilight of the gods in football, Mengniu has selected Mbappe, who does not want to be a copy of others and has the courage to create his own story. This young and powerful force is also particularly touching. And Mbappe's dazzling performance in the 2022 World Cup finals perfectly explained the strong spirit of never giving up.

In terms of advertising, the advertising short film "Youth Is Just a Few World Cups" presents classic memories from 1978 to 2022, reliving the stars and games that accompanied everyone in those years, triggering memories and resonance for countless people. With the ten-day countdown to the World Cup, "Go Strong" uses extremely impactful slow-motion close-ups and British commentary for the world to show everyone the heroic appearance of the captain in the World Cup. Through a series of advertising short films, Mengniu has achieved multi-dimensional and three-dimensional content output, created a sense of atmosphere and ceremony, and conveyed the story and value of the World Cup to the audience.

In addition, Mengniu's brand marketing pays special attention to interaction with young users. The battle for first place and second place in the 2022 World Cup happened to be between Mengniu's spokespersons, and Mengniu also took advantage of the trend to launch the topic "Messi Mbappe, who does Mengniu love more" on social media, shifting the focus of the topic to the brand. On the night of the finals, this topic received over 300 million views and over 20,000 discussions. The billboard on the night of the finals "Don't panic tonight" also responded to the "yao qiang (wall)" meme four years ago. Mengniu's promotion on social media dared to "receive memes" and was willing to "play with memes". This way can be closest to young people, brings the audience closer to the World Cup, leading users to enjoy the enthusiasm and charm of the World Cup, and further conveying the brand value.

Comprehensive layout, using sports stars and IP to explore the spirit of To Be Strong, tell the story of To Be Strong, and convey the charm of sports events to the hearts of every user. It also

demonstrates the connotation and value of the brand and creates business opportunities to the world. This is the strengths of the Mengniu brand in sports marketing and an important reason for its success.

4.2. Weaknesses: Product Development Space

In the process of the brand going global through sports marketing, the development space of the product itself has become the weakness of the Mengniu brand. Although the brand has gained a certain degree of popularity internationally through the marketing of the two World Cups, as far as the products themselves are concerned, Mengniu's various categories of products have not yet opened up broad sales in the international market, and the influence of the products is far less than the brand's popularity. Mengniu does not have an advantage in terms of product prices. Taking the Chinese domestic market as an example, the market pricing of Mengniu products is not low, and is even higher than many similar imported products. On the other hand, as a dairy brand, Mengniu's various product categories, such as milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream, etc., are not closely related to the sports events themselves. Although Mengniu cleverly combines brand value with sportsmanship in marketing to solve this problem, it is still a weakness for brand in sports marketing. In addition, better aligning product technology and quality with international standards is also a weakness that Mengniu needs to strengthen on its future globalization path.

4.3. Opportunities: Experience, Resources and the Future

In terms of opportunities for the future development of the brand, as the influence of sports events continues to expand throughout the world, coupled with the popularity that successful sports marketing has brought to the brand in the past, Mengniu has huge potential for future sports marketing development. At the same time, Mengniu has gained rich experience through years of successful sports marketing and accumulated a large number of resources including sports stars, media platforms, marketing capabilities and advertising production. Therefore, as future competitions are held one after another, Mengniu has sufficient foundation and strength to formulate plans and strategies for future sports events marketing. Moreover, with the improvement of consumption levels around the world, Mengniu products have a broad international market. These are undoubtedly opportunities for brands in future sports marketing.

4.4. Threats: Competition, Innovation and Uncertainty

At the same time, the Mengniu brand is facing strong competition from domestic and foreign brands, especially Yili, which is also a domestic dairy giant. It has also been deeply involved in sports marketing for many years, bringing strong competitive pressure to Mengniu. In addition, with the changes in consumer consumption concepts in recent years, users tend to pursue "clean" food and products without additives. In the fierce competition, whether the ingredient list of Mengniu products can withstand the test is one of the potential problems for the future development of the brand. In terms of sports marketing, uncertainty has become the charm of competitive sports on the one hand, but on the other hand it has become a threat that brand value and brand image will be affected. The results of sports events are often highly uncertain. In the quarter-finals of the 2018 World Cup, Mengniu spokesperson Messi's Argentina team was eliminated in the quarter-finals. This will undoubtedly bring impact to the brand. The incident of Messi's trip to China in early 2024 caused Messi's glorious image in the minds of Chinese fans to collapse instantly, which is bound to have a serious impact on the brand image. In addition, Mengniu, which has already conducted many event marketing, whether can innovate and avoid audience fatigue in the next competition. This is also a problem that brand sports marketing will face in the future.

5. Conclusion

Using SWOT analysis method to analyze the sports marketing strategy of Mengniu brand, the article believes that, from the perspective of internal factors of the brand and products, Mengniu's strengths are mainly reflected in the effective connection between brand value and sportsmanship, the brand's advertising campaign and marketing capabilities, and the brand's accumulated international popularity. The weaknesses of the brand are mainly reflected in the development space of the product itself, including price competitiveness, the correlation between the product and sports events, and the international influence of the product. From the perspective of external factors, Mengniu's opportunities are mainly reflected in the sports marketing experience and resources that the brand has accumulated, the expanding influence of sports events, and the huge potential for formulating future sports marketing strategies. The threats to brand development are reflected in fierce market competition, uncertainty about sports events and sports stars, and future marketing innovation issues. On this basis, comprehensive brand advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and threats can provide choices and guidance for the brand's future sports marketing strategic choices.

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