

The Role of Building Triggers in Enhancing Corporate Brand Associations

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Abstract:

The phenomenon of market homogenization has intensified, resulting in increasingly fierce vicious competition among enterprises and loss of vitality in the development of the industry. Reduced consumer loyalty to enterprises and brands is the main manifestation of this phenomenon. This homogenized competition in the market will not only bring about a waste of corporate resources, but also lead to market mechanism failure and chaos in the industry. However, Barbie, POP Mart and KFC are three famous brands that have broken the market homogenization competition by establishing effective triggering mechanisms to promote consumers to generate brand associations and thus increase customer loyalty. We found that there are two types of triggers, one is external perception and the other is internal emotion. By choosing different stimulus points, companies can create effective triggers that have a wide range of communication and are closely related to the brand, and these triggers can help consumers form a cognitive system of the brand and deepen brand associations, thus increasing customer loyalty. This analysis helps other companies in the same industry to open up new marketing models. It helps enterprises to get rid of the phenomenon of market homogenization, reduce vicious competition in the industry, and maintain the healthy development of the industry.

Keywords: Trigger; Brand Association; Market Homogeneity; Customer Loyalty; Consumer Psychology.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

According to Professor Schmidt's research in the Journal of Economics, if companies want to maximize their profits from market competition, they always choose to constantly innovate their products.

Rapid product iteration and fierce competition among enterprises lead to the emergence of market homogenization phenomenon. In this market environment, the level of consumer loyalty becomes an important factor for companies to break through this impasse [1]. The enhancement of customer loyalty of a company requires the strengthening of the link between the customer and the company's brand. This link is

also called brand association [2]. Because of brand associations, customers create a system of trigger points for brands [3]. These trigger points are a kind of stimulating signals researched by companies based on consumer psychology. These trigger points are used in marketing campaigns to stimulate brand associations and consumer behavior [4]. In short, creating good brand triggers deepens the brand associations of customers. Deepening customer brand association can improve corporate reputation and customer loyalty. High customer loyalty can help enterprises get rid of the phenomenon of market homogenization, enhance the competitiveness of enterprises, so that enterprises can obtain higher profits.

1.2 Research Gap and Methods

In the past, many scholars have conducted in-depth research in the areas of brand association, customer loyalty and market homogenization. For example, Professor Schmidt in his article examined the relationship between market homogenization problems and consumer brand loyalty. In 2021 a study by Mensah, Oppong and Addae showed that brand association plays an important role in promoting consumer loyalty. However, there is less research in 'the relationship between trigger and brand association' area.

To fill the gap, this paper focuses on the importance of the building of triggers in driving brand association through the method of analyzing and generalizing case studies. According to Professor Jonah Berger's description in the book 'Contagious', it can be concluded that successful trigger points must be characterized by long exposure time, high trigger frequency, and high association with the brand or product [5]. According to these characteristics, the author summarized the following five aspects to measure whether the establishment of trigger can promote brand association: brand communication coverage, brand sustained impact, user interaction frequency, customer retention rate and brand churn rate. When conducting the case study, it is mainly based on these five aspects to determine whether the trigger construction is successful and whether it can promote the role of brand association.

2. Case description

Based on these five aspects, this paper will analyze them through the following three case studies. Start by examining the relationship between triggers and brand associations. Then, provide some strategies that can build successful triggers. Finally, explore the types of triggers based on consumer psychology.

2.1 Barbie

Mattel Toy Company is a very typical example. By letting the highly saturated signature Barbie pink be exposed for

a long time in movies, images, stores and logos, it has continuously deepened the association between Barbie fans and the Barbie brand. The Barbie pink represents the feminine element and the personality traits of gentleness, firmness and tolerance. Because Barbie's brand culture is to promote the spirit of women and the freedom of life attitude. It fits perfectly with what the pink represents. That's why the Barbie brand has created Barbie Pink as a unique brand trigger. From the early days of its establishment to the present, the Barbie brand has a global popularity of more than 99% [6]. Since pink is a very common color in life, the Barbie brand chose pink as a trigger for the brand to expand its reach. When consumers see a similar pink, they can easily associate it with Barbie. In addition, the Barbie brand associates the brand's promotional spirit with the color pink, giving Barbie pink a unique meaning. And this concept is repeatedly marketed in the Barbie brand's movie and television productions and online websites, which strengthens the precise link of brand association, thus increasing consumer loyalty towards the Barbie brand. It enhanced the reputation of the Barbie brand, and as a result, the Barbie brand was successfully built into the number one fashion doll in the world [6].

2.2 POP Mart

POP Mart is an IP trend-setting blind box toy company. By co-branding with major anime IPs and incorporating their designs into POP Mart's blind box doll designs, dolls from the same series are packaged in the same box and sold at a low price of 100 RMB. At the same time, there are also hidden limited edition dolls, and consumers can only get their favorite dolls through a blind selection. POP Mart utilizes the novelty and satisfaction brought about by the gambler's mentality to create an addictive behavior of purchasing the blind box, making the blind box a trigger for its brand. It also increases the frequency of blind selection box triggers by setting up a large number of stores offline and launching marketing campaigns in large shopping malls around the world, making the purchase of blind selection boxes a trend. Today, POP Mart has more than 500 offline stores, more than 2,300 retail and online stores, and a large number of blind box vending machines in more than 30 countries around the world [7]. The high trigger rate of blind boxes, which can be seen everywhere, will repeatedly stimulate consumption. The desire to buy, low prices and the urgency to get the dolls they like will prompt consumers to ignore the sunk costs and repeatedly buy blind boxes until they get their favorite dolls, and eventually become addicted to the brand unknowingly, and the brand association of their brands. As of 2023, POP Mart's annual net profit margin increases from 12.4% in 2022 to 16.8% in 2023 and continues to rise. [8] POP Mart has also formed a huge fan group for its brand. The brand's user interaction rate is constantly soaring, and its

customer retention rate is also at a very good level. Consumers' favor and trust in its brand reputation also allow

POP Mart to maintain continuous vitality in the competitive market.

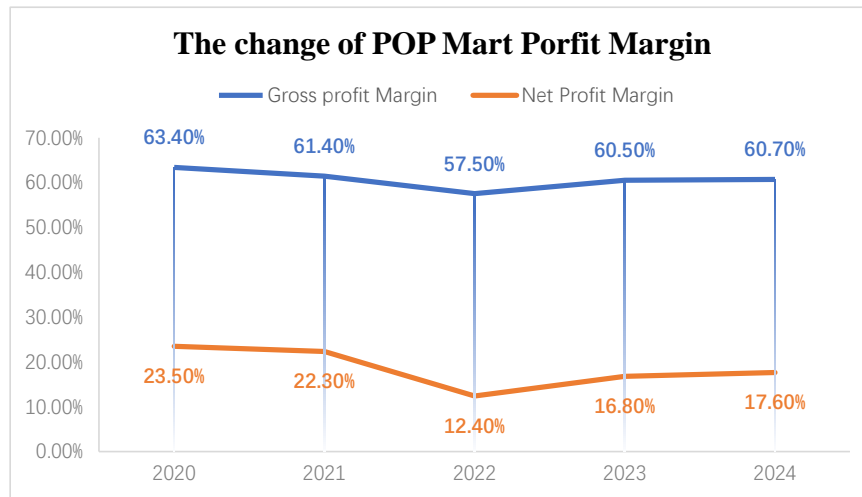


Fig. 1 The change of POP Mart Profit Margin[8].

2.3 KFC Crazy Thursday

KFC takes advantage of the “false fatigue effect” that is closely related to human fatigue in psychology. Thursday is the time when people’s autonomic nerves are most chaotic, so a lot of fatigue self-suggestions will be produced. Currently, the need to vent emotions is highest [9]. So, KFC will use Thursday as the tipping point of its marketing campaign. KFC uses magical slogans and repeated emphasis in advertisements to closely connect KFC with the trigger of Thursday, which enhances consumers’ brand association with KFC. When the autonomic nervous exhaustion period comes on Thursday, the unreleased pressure in consumers’ minds reaches its peak, and they will think of the “Crazy Thursday” activity. Purchasing this activity becomes the perfect release point for their emotions, thus leading to KFC’s user interaction rate Improved, in 2022, China KFC’s revenue increased by 3% compared with the previous year, which is US\$7.2 billion [10]. This trigger not only brings high revenue to the company, but also improves consumer satisfaction with KFC. These consumers are willing to spread word of mouth spontaneously to increase KFC’s popularity and reputation.

3. Case analysis

3.1 The Relationship between Trigger and Brand Association

Barbie is a popular fashion toy designed by Mattel Toys based on the principle of color psychology. According to this principle, the visual impact brought by color will indirectly affect consumers’ emotions [11]. The triggers for

such visual stimuli are often constructed by companies using exposure-enhanced marketing techniques. In this way, the visual impact generated by the trigger can prolong the lasting impact of the brand. Ultimately, it achieves the purpose of enhancing consumers’ brand association with a fixed brand.

POP Mart’s gradual revenue growth trend reflects the success of its brand triggers. According to the scarcity effect, which means consumers often have a sense of crisis due to the scarcity of products, thus stimulating product sales [12]. Triggers born under this principle have the characteristics of high triggering frequency. Frequent triggers stimulate consumers to satisfy their curiosity and generate a steady stream of purchasing desires. Ultimately, consumers ignore sunk costs and become addicted to the brand, increasing customer loyalty. Retention rate, thereby enhancing consumers’ brand association with the brand.

KFC is based on the false fatigue effect, where people will have a fatigue cycle at a specific time [9]. The resulting link between the trigger and the brand has a high degree of closeness, which can enhance consumers’ brand association with the fixed brand by increasing the frequency of user interaction and relieving the fatigue caused by nervous confusion.

3.2 Effective trigger establishment strategy and classification

Through the different ways of stimulating consumers in these three cases, the categories of triggers can be summarized into two types, external perception triggers and internal emotion triggers.

The external perception category represented by Barbie,

this type of trigger mainly focuses on stimulating the consumer's senses, such as vision. When creating, you need to pay attention to selecting elements with strong impact as triggers and focus on increasing their exposure.

POP Mart and KFC represent internal emotional triggers, which mainly generate emotional resonance with consumers. When establishing this kind of trigger, you need to pay attention to the public emotional trends in the current society, find out the emotional points as triggers, and closely integrate them with the brand concept or product.

3.3 Suggestions

Barbie, POP Mart and KFC symbolize the toy industry, the fashion, culture and entertainment industry and the restaurant industry, respectively. These three brands in three different industries have delivered significant benefits to their organizations by building triggers to drive brand associations. The success of these three companies shows that the strategy of building triggers to drive brand association is very flexible and practical. Companies in the same industry can emulate their marketing strategies to improve their own revenue.

It is recommended that when using this strategy, the first step is to define the brand's positioning and culture. After determining the category of the trigger point, the next step is to tie the trigger point to the brand through marketing tools to enhance brand association. This step requires attention to expanding the exposure of the trigger point and increasing the frequency of triggers. For example, Barbie, on one hand, increases the exposure of pink as the Barbie logo by using pink as the main color of its brand and design. On the other hand, pink is a very common color in life, so the trigger frequency is very high and it is very easy to enhance consumers' brand association. When a company's trigger has these two characteristics, it is a sign that the company has successfully constructed an effective trigger that drives brand association.

4. Conclusion

Overall, through analyzing Barbie, POP Mart and KFC, this paper proves that the construction of trigger points can effectively promote brand association. And it can make the enterprise obtain growing profits in the fierce homogenization competition environment. Meanwhile,

this paper also gives two kinds of triggering methods, external perception triggering and internal emotion triggering, according to the principle of consumer psychology. And it summarizes the elements of successful triggering in these three examples. and finds that the strategy has some flexibility and universality. Finally, it gives recommendations that are consistent with the use of this strategy in most organizations.

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