

Research on Offline Marketing Strategies in the Outdoor Apparel Market: A Case Study of the Chinese Mainland Market

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Abstract:

Since the rise of outdoor wind in 2021, along with improving living standards and enhancing health awareness among residents in mainland China, outdoor sports have gradually become part of people's daily lives, promoting the rapid growth of the outdoor apparel market. However, with the rise of e-commerce, offline marketing faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities. This study takes the outdoor apparel market in mainland China as an example, focusing on the offline marketing strategies of brands in this market, including how brands attract consumers through physical stores, experiential activities, community building, and other methods. The research used methods such as literature review, market research, and case analysis to analyze the market performance of local and international brands and the strengths and weaknesses of their marketing strategies. The research results show that there is significant brand homogeneity and that consumers are increasingly demanding products that are functional, environmentally friendly and that they can identify with. Meanwhile, digital marketing is becoming increasingly important in the market, and brands have successfully expanded their brand influence through social media, KOL marketing, live streaming, and other methods. The research concluded that brands need to continuously upgrade in technological innovation, consumer experience, environmental sustainability, etc., and enhance their competitiveness through online and offline omnichannel marketing strategies to cope with the increasingly fierce market competition.

Keywords: Outdoor apparel market; offline marketing strategy; Chinese mainland market; KOL marketing; environmental protection and sustainable development.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the improvement of people's living standards and increasing health awareness, outdoor sports have gradually become an important part of people's daily lives, which in turn has driven the rapid development of the outdoor apparel market. As one of the world's most promising consumer markets, the mainland China market is seeing the outdoor apparel industry grow in size and influence. However, with the rise of e-commerce, offline marketing faces new challenges and opportunities. How to effectively utilize offline marketing strategies in the face of fierce market competition and increase a brand's market share has become an important topic of current research. The purpose of this study is to explore in depth the current situation, characteristics, and effectiveness of offline marketing strategies in the mainland China outdoor apparel market. By analyzing offline channels, it is hoped to understand how companies can use strategies such as physical stores, event promotions, and experiential marketing to attract and retain consumers in a changing market environment. Through this study, it is hoped that valuable suggestions and guidance can be provided for the development of outdoor apparel brands in the Chinese market.

This study helps to enrich and expand the performance of marketing theory in practical applications, especially in the current context of online and offline integration of omni-channel marketing, a re-examination of offline marketing strategies has important theoretical value. Currently, there is relatively little attention in the field of marketing to the outdoor apparel industry, and there are even fewer studies on offline marketing strategies, especially in the unique environment of the Chinese mainland market. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap in this field and provide theoretical support for follow-up research. This article will focus on the Chinese mainland market, and systematically explore the implementation and effectiveness of offline marketing strategies through literature reviews, market research, and case studies. Focus on analyzing how outdoor apparel brands can enhance brand awareness and loyalty through store design, experiential activities, and brand community building. Although online marketing has come to occupy an important position in the modern business environment, offline marketing still plays an irreplaceable role in the outdoor apparel market. Especially in the Chinese mainland market, consumers' perceptions and experiences of brands are highly dependent on offline touchpoints. Therefore, studying how offline marketing strategies can complement online channels will help outdoor apparel brands gain a competitive advantage in the market.

2. Overview of the Outdoor Clothing Market

The Chinese outdoor clothing market refers to the market for professional clothing designed to meet the needs of outdoor sports and activities, including functional clothing with functions such as windproof, waterproof, warm, and breathable. It can be divided into waterproof and windproof clothing (such as storm jackets), warm clothing (such as down jackets), breathable and quick-drying clothing (such as quick-drying shirts), and other outdoor accessories according to their functions.

The outdoor clothing market in mainland China started in the 1990s, and in the early days, it mainly relied on imported brands. With the improvement of consumption levels and the popularity of outdoor sports, domestic brands have gradually emerged. At present, the market size of China's outdoor clothing market is rapidly expanding, and the market size in 2023 will exceed 100 billion yuan, with an annual growth rate of over 10%, showing a steady growth trend [1]. Consumers' increasing demand for functionality, design, and brand recognition has driven the rapid development of high-end and niche markets. According to the 2023 market research report of I.T Group (Guangpai Commerce (HK)), the outdoor apparel market in mainland China has grown at a rate of about 10% per year in recent years, and it is expected to maintain this relatively high growth rate in the next few years. In 2023, the Chinese outdoor clothing market will have reached tens of billions of RMB in size, covering a wide range of outdoor equipment categories such as clothing, footwear, and backpacks.

The main factors driving growth in the outdoor apparel market include increased health awareness, inland urbanization and consumption upgrades, and the driving role of the outdoor tourism industry. With the improvement of national health awareness, more and more people are participating in outdoor activities such as mountaineering, hiking, skiing, and camping, which directly promotes the increased demand for outdoor clothing. Outdoor clothing is not only functional but also meets consumers' needs for dressing in a healthy lifestyle. With the acceleration of urbanization, more and more city dwellers prefer to go on short outdoor trips at weekends or during their holidays. This type of 'light outdoor' activity has created a widespread demand for outdoor leisure clothing, driving market expansion. The vigorous development of domestic and international tourism has also boosted the outdoor clothing market. More and more consumers prefer to buy professional outdoor clothing to cope with different climates and environmental needs during travel.

Overall, the outdoor clothing market still has huge poten-

tial for future growth. As the new generation of consumers identifies more strongly with the outdoor lifestyle, more brands will launch products and marketing strategies targeting specific groups of people to consolidate their market share.

3. Consumer Behaviour Analysis

The profile of the outdoor clothing consumer group in mainland China is characterized by diversity, covering a wide range of people from entry-level enthusiasts to experienced outdoor sportsmen. With the improvement of people's health awareness and lifestyle changes, outdoor sports have gradually become more popular, and consumer demand is becoming increasingly diverse. From a demand perspective, the younger generation pays attention to the fashionability and brand influence of the product, while senior outdoor enthusiasts pay more attention to the functionality and professionalism of the product, such as windproof, waterproof, and thermal insulation performance indicators. Meanwhile, with the growing environmental awareness, environmentally friendly materials have also become a key concern for consumers. The brand is one of the main factors considered by consumers during the purchasing decision-making process, and high-end consumers in particular prefer well-known brands to ensure product quality and after-sales service. Price plays an important role in consumer decision-making. Consumers in the mid-to-high-end market are willing to pay a premium for high-quality and high-performance products, while entry-level consumers pay more attention to cost performance. In addition, consumers are increasingly focusing on the versatility and innovative design of products, such as lightweight, breathable, and compressible features, which have become important factors affecting purchases. Social media and KOLs (key opinion leaders) play an increasingly important role in the consumer decision-making process, helping consumers make more informed choices by sharing their experiences and product reviews. Overall, the outdoor apparel consumer market in mainland China is moving towards high-end, personalized, and functional products, with brand influence, product functionality, and pricing strategies becoming key drivers of consumer purchasing decisions.

4. Brand Marketing Strategy Research

As digital transformation accelerates, outdoor apparel brands are embracing social media and digital marketing strategies. The Chinese mainland market in particular relies on social media and digital platforms to obtain information that influences consumers' purchasing deci-

sions. In this context, brands effectively reach their target consumer groups through social media marketing, KOL (key opinion leader) marketing, and live streaming. The main models are social media-related push marketing, KOL marketing, and live-streaming platforms. Social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok are important channels for brands to interact with consumers. Outdoor brands use these platforms to release information about new products, outdoor event content, and consumer experiences, enhancing brand exposure and influence. In particular, through interactions on platforms such as Weibo and TikTok, brands can quickly obtain user feedback and adjust their product strategies according to consumer needs.

Key opinion leaders have a huge influence in the Chinese market. Many outdoor brands choose to collaborate with influential outdoor athletes, bloggers, and professional reviewers to enhance the trustworthiness and reputation of the brand through the KOL's experience and recommendations of the product. KOLs not only drive the purchasing desire of their fan base but also give the brand a more authoritative image through their professional background. For example, Patagonia has effectively attracted environmentally conscious consumers by collaborating with environmentally friendly KOLs to promote its sustainable brand concept. On the other hand, live shopping is rapidly gaining ground in the Chinese market and has become an important way to boost brand sales. Outdoor clothing brands use platforms such as Taobao and TikTok to broadcast live sales, which can be compared with traditional advertising, live streaming is more vivid and intuitive and can provide consumers with better support for purchasing decisions. For example, brands such as Toread use live broadcasts to demonstrate to consumers the functional testing of products, such as waterproofing and windproofing, which enhances consumer trust and desire to purchase.

Digital marketing and social media strategies provide brands with more flexible and efficient marketing channels. Especially with the high penetration of mobile internet, brands can achieve more precise market positioning and more direct consumer interaction through these digital means. Omnichannel integrated marketing is the core of online and offline linkage strategies and is the core approach of e-commerce at this stage. With the rapid development of e-commerce, outdoor apparel brands are increasingly adopting an omni-channel integrated marketing strategy that combines online and offline sales channels to create a seamless consumer shopping experience [2]. Omnichannel integrated marketing not only expands the reach of a brand, it also enhances interaction between the brand and consumers and increases brand loyalty [3]. Online and

offline integration allows brands to provide an integrated shopping experience by combining e-commerce platforms with offline stores. For example, consumers can use the brand's online platform to view product information and try on or experience the product in a physical store. This combination of online and offline not only provides convenience for consumers but also enhances the service quality of the brand [4]. For example, The North Face offers an online booking service for offline experiences, where consumers can choose products online and then experience them in-store, further enhancing the certainty of their purchasing decisions. The importance of efficiency is also defined by the integration of inventory allocation and logistics. By sharing online and offline inventories, brands can manage the supply chain more efficiently, ensure the timely supply of products, and avoid the loss of consumers caused by online and offline inventory issues. At the same time, by strengthening cooperation with logistics companies, brands can provide faster delivery services and enhance the shopping experience for consumers. At the same time, by strengthening cooperation with logistics companies, brands can provide faster delivery services and enhance the shopping experience for consumers. For example, through an omnichannel system, Toread redirects online orders to the store closest to the consumer for delivery, significantly reducing delivery times. Despite the rapid development of e-commerce, the experience of offline stores is still irreplaceable. Outdoor brands provide a wealth of experiential activities through offline stores, such as rock climbing experiences and outdoor courses, which not only enhance consumers' sense of participation but also further promote the brand culture. This kind of experiential marketing can enhance consumers' emotional identification with the brand, thereby increasing brand

In recent years, environmental protection and sustainable development have become important factors in consumer purchasing decisions, especially in the outdoor apparel industry, where consumers have higher expectations for brands' environmental awareness. By incorporating sustainability into marketing strategies, brands can not only enhance their brand image but also attract environmentally conscious consumer groups [5].

Outdoor clothing brands enhance their environmentally friendly image by launching products made from environmentally friendly materials, such as recycled plastic or organic cotton. Patagonia is a leader in its industry, having gained a large and environmentally conscious consumer following through its use of sustainable materials and implementation of environmentally friendly practices at every stage of the product life cycle. In addition, Patagonia has launched the 'Worn Wear' project to encourage consumers to recycle old clothes and further promote

the brand's environmental protection concept [6]. Some brands have been able to enhance their image of social responsibility and establish a deeper emotional connection with environmentally conscious consumers through environmentally related marketing activities. For example, The North Face launched the 'Explore a Sustainable Future' marketing campaign to convey the brand's commitment to sustainability to consumers through environmental protection initiatives and public welfare activities. Arcteryx and Burton demonstrate their commitment to sustainability through third-party environmental certifications, such as using GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) certified materials or obtaining bluesign® certification to ensure the environmental protection and sustainability of their supply chain [7]. This transparent production process can enhance consumer trust in the brand.

5. Case Analysis

The mainland China outdoor apparel market is highly competitive and is dominated by two camps: local brands and international brands. Take local brands such as Tansuoer and Luotuo and international brands such as Arc'teryx, The North Face, and Columbia as examples, and comparative analysis can be carried out from the perspectives of market positioning and product strategy.

In terms of market positioning, local brands such as Pathfinder and Camel are relatively down-to-earth, targeting consumers mainly from the middle-income group and lovers of daily outdoor activities. Toread focuses on the mass outdoor market and specializes in providing cost-effective outdoor equipment for activities such as mountaineering, hiking, and camping. Camel is mainly aimed at the broader demand for leisure and outdoor activities. Its products are positioned for daily outdoor and light outdoor activities, with moderate prices and an emphasis on comfort and durability [8]. International brands such as Arc'teryx, The North Face, and Columbia are positioned at the relatively high end of the market in mainland China, focusing on the professional outdoor sports sector. With its high technical content and excellent performance, the Archaeopteryx is positioned. The north side not only has an advantage in professional outdoor activities but also enters the daily fashion market. Colombia is known for its unique technical innovations and functional clothing, mainly for the middle-to-high-income outdoor sports group, suitable for a wide range of needs from light outdoors to extreme adventure [9].

In terms of product positioning and pricing strategies, the product strategy of Toread focuses on price advantages and functionality. By using low-cost but practical materials. Toread ensures that the product's functions meet the

needs of the general public outdoors while maintaining competitive pricing. Camel's product line covers a wide range, from outdoor clothing and footwear to accessories, focusing on comfort and versatility. Most of the products use mid-to-low-end materials to attract more consumers. Although the products are affordable, they are relatively weak in terms of technology and innovation, especially in terms of equipment that can cope with extreme outdoor environments. On the other hand, brands such as Arc'teryx, North Face and Columbia focus more on technological innovation and product quality. Arc'teryx maintains its leading position in the high-end outdoor apparel market segment through the use of innovative materials and technologies such as Gore-Tex waterproof and breathable materials. Its products are known for their outstanding durability and lightweight. The north side, on the other hand, has launched a crossover collaboration series that combines fashion and functionality, while maintaining its professional outdoor positioning, to attract more young and fashionable groups. Columbia focuses on a technology-driven product strategy, such as its unique Omni-Tech waterproof and breathable technology and Omni-Heat reflective warmth technology, making its products suitable for a variety of outdoor environments and outstanding in functionality.

Reflecting on and comparing the successful experiences and shortcomings of local and international brands, Pathfinder and Camel have successfully attracted a large number of entry-level outdoor enthusiasts with their cost-effectiveness and wide product coverage, and have achieved high market penetration. Both also performed well in online marketing, especially in terms of sales and the effectiveness of promotional activities on e-commerce platforms. They benefited from the e-commerce dividend in China and grew rapidly. Although Pathfinder and Camel have performed well in the mass market, they are relatively weak in terms of brand upgrading, technological innovation, and international competitiveness. Especially in the field of professional outdoor equipment and extreme sports, there is a big gap between these local brands and international brands. In addition, offline experience stores lack innovation, and consumers have low brand loyalty and engagement, and a vague brand image. In contrast, brands such as Arc'teryx, North Face, and Columbia have performed well in the Chinese market thanks to their technological innovation and strong brand positioning. Primus occupies the high-end market segment with its high-end products and professional image, while Beiwei attracts a wide range of consumers with its diverse product line. International brands also have their own unique marketing innovations, especially experiential marketing, social media interaction, and community marketing, which have

enhanced brand loyalty and influence. However, the main challenge for international brands is to further localize, especially in terms of cultural and aesthetic preferences, to better connect with Chinese consumers. The high-end pricing strategy of some international brands also makes it difficult for them to enter the mid-to-low-end market, limiting the expansion of the potential consumer base. In addition, international brands often have higher prices during e-commerce promotional activities, making it difficult for them to compete with local brands.

6. Challenges and Future Trends in Outdoor Apparel Marketing

With the popularity of outdoor sports and healthy lifestyles, more and more brands are entering the outdoor apparel market, leading to market saturation and increasing brand homogeneity. As there are few differences in the functionality and design of products from different brands, consumers are often confused when making a choice. Brands face a huge challenge in how to stand out from the crowd to attract and retain consumers. Relying solely on traditional functional and cost advantages is no longer enough to make a brand stand out. Brands need to find a breakthrough in areas such as brand culture and consumer experience to gain a foothold in the face of fierce competition [10].

At the same time, consumers' environmental awareness is constantly increasing, especially among the new generation of consumers who are increasingly concerned about sustainable development. Outdoor apparel brands not only need to meet consumer demand for product functionality and quality, but also demonstrate their sense of social and environmental responsibility through initiatives such as using environmentally friendly materials, promoting a circular economy, and reducing carbon emissions. Green marketing concepts have become an important part of brand competitiveness. Technological innovation is also a key driver of market development. With the trend towards professionalization of outdoor activities, smart fabrics and high-tech materials with better breathability, water resistance, and durability are constantly being developed, which not only helps brands enhance the market appeal of their products but also improves the actual user experience.

The rise of new consumer groups has also brought significant changes to the outdoor apparel market. Young consumers, represented by Generation Z, pay more attention to personalization, fashion, and the fit between brand concepts and their values. Their identification with a brand is based not only on the product itself but also on the brand.

Therefore, brands must not only optimize product design but also add more content with a value dimension to brand marketing. To better connect with the younger generation, outdoor brands need to actively use social media platforms to enhance consumer engagement and loyalty through collaborations with KOLs (key opinion leaders), content marketing, and experiential activities that combine online and offline.

In addition, digital marketing is playing an increasingly important role in the outdoor clothing industry. The rapid development of e-commerce and social media has brought new opportunities for brands, but it is also accompanied by information overload and fierce online competition. Brands need to adopt effective strategies such as accurate big data analysis, personalized recommendations, social e-commerce, and live streaming to enhance the online experience of consumers. Although digital marketing can help brands increase their influence and boost sales, in the process, how to stand out from the massive amount of information and capture the attention of consumers remains a huge challenge for brands. In the future, outdoor apparel brands will only be able to maintain a long-term leading position in the highly competitive market by making comprehensive progress in addressing market saturation, complying with environmental trends, adapting to the needs of emerging consumer groups, and optimizing digital marketing strategies.

7. Conclusion

This study identifies important challenges and opportunities for brands in the competitive market by analysing offline marketing strategies and future trends in the outdoor apparel market in mainland China. First, with the popularity of outdoor sports and the expansion of the market, the problem of brand homogeneity is becoming increasingly prominent. When prices are similar, brands can only effectively increase consumer loyalty and market share through differentiation strategies and personalised services. Second, consumer demand for products is becoming increasingly diverse. High-end users pay more attention to the functionality and innovation of products, while emerging consumers pay attention to the fashionability, environmental protection concept and brand value communication of products. Brands therefore need to innovate continuously in product design and attract consumers who care about sustainability through environmentally friendly materials and technologies. In addition, the rise of digital marketing has provided brands with more ways to reach consumers. Especially in mainland China, a market

that relies heavily on e-commerce and social media, the combination of online and offline marketing has become an important strategy for brand development.

In terms of macro recommendations for the mainland outdoor apparel industry, first, brands should further increase investment in technological research and development and functional innovation to ensure that their products are always at the forefront of the market in terms of function and performance. Second, brands need to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' diverse needs, especially the individual needs of emerging consumer groups, and use methods such as social media and KOL marketing to establish a closer connection with consumers. For local brands, they should strengthen the enhancement of their brand image, and find a differentiated market position. Finally, brands should continue to promote environmental protection and sustainable development strategies to meet consumers' growing environmental needs by improving supply chain transparency and using sustainable materials.

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