The Impact of SHEIN's Content Marketing on Consumer Perceptions in the Digital Marketing Process

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Abstract: With the rapid development of the Internet and digital technology, content marketing strategy has become increasingly important in the field of digital marketing. However, there is insufficient research on how a brand's digital content marketing affects consumers' purchase intention, especially among emerging brands. In this study, the SHEIN brand was used as a reference. Through a comprehensive literature review and in-depth case analysis, this research systematically explores its core digital content marketing strategy and reveals the core elements of its success. The research results show that SHEIN's user-generated content (UGC) strategy in digital content marketing, especially social media marketing, encourages consumers to independently shoot and write SHEIN product content, thereby increasing new consumers' product recognition and thus influencing consumers' purchases. This strategy not only deepens consumers' positive impression and awareness of the SHEIN brand but also significantly enhances their purchase intentions. Through this analysis, brands can effectively attract and retain customers by articulating their core values and developing precise digital content marketing strategies accordingly. This research provides valuable insights into how brands can build and implement effective content marketing strategies in the digital age, especially in terms of how to attract and retain younger consumers. At the same time, the companies should also realize that with the continuous advancement of technology, future digital content marketing strategies will continue to evolve, and brands need to maintain keen insights and constantly adapt to new market environments and consumer needs.

Keywords: Content Marketing, Digital Marketing, SHEIN, Customer Purchase Intention, Customer Perception

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the Internet and digital technology, the importance of content marketing strategy in the digital marketing process continues to be highlighted. Many large brand companies conduct brand content marketing through digital platforms such as search engines, websites, display advertisements, and social media. Content marketing is a strategy to engage, acquire, and connect with the target audience by creating content relevant to the brand's values. Its core purpose is to enhance customer value, brand engagement, and loyalty [1]. Digital marketing relies on digital means such as network technology, new media technology, and interactive technology to accurately implement marketing activities and aim to achieve established marketing goals [2]. With

the rapid development of digital technology and communication fields, the purpose and meaning of content marketing have undergone profound changes, which has given rise to the development of digital content marketing (DCM) [3]. Digital Content Marketing works to influence customer perceptions in the Marketing Process. These researchers conclude that properly delivered, satisfying DCM content can trigger active target audience engagement [3]. First, when consumers are exposed to valuable digital content, their brand awareness and likability are enhanced. Subsequently, this content stimulates their interests and needs, increasing their interest in related products. On top of building trust, consumers are more likely to make a purchase. Finally, personalized recommendations and experiences make it easier for consumers to find products that meet their needs, thereby increasing purchase conversion [3]. In the context of globalization and digitalization, SHEIN, a fast fashion brand, has rapidly emerged in the global market with its unique fast fashion concept and price differentiation advantage. In recent years, SHEIN's brand development has undergone a major transformation and upgrade as a result of the precise application of digital marketing strategies and continuous innovation. This study will highlight the centrality of content marketing in the SHEIN digital marketing ecosystem and is designed to provide useful reference and inspiration for global expansion companies seeking to enhance brand competitiveness and achieve global expansion through digital content strategies. First, this study will trace the development history of the SHEIN brand and provide an in-depth analysis of key milestones and strategic turning points in its brand growth. This helps companies to understand how SHEIN adapts to market changes and reveals its brand ethos of constantly seeking innovation and breakthroughs. The study will then focus on the central role of content marketing in SHEIN's success. Through diversified digital content formats, SHEIN has successfully captured the attention of global consumers, established deep brand loyalty, and effectively expanded its market presence. In addition, this study will further explore the profound impact of SHEIN digital marketing on consumer purchasing behavior. With its precise digital channel layout and engaging content presentation, SHEIN has not only reshaped consumer fashion preferences and led the way to a certain extent, but also increased consumer willingness to purchase, further cementing its position in the highly competitive fashion space.

2. Introduction to the SHEIN Brand

2.1. The Development and Origin of SHEIN

SHEIN, founded by Chris Xu in 2008 as a wedding dress e-commerce platform, has evolved into a prominent cross-border fast fashion brand specializing in women's wear. During the company's early years between 2008 and 2010, SHEIN capitalized on emerging Internet celebrity trends, accruing initial funds and gaining valuable experience in overseas e-commerce. Over the next few years, from 2011 to 2014, the brand shifted its marketing focus and began to forge a distinct brand identity, while establishing a separate online presence in international markets [4]. SHEIN has been riding the wave of overseas e-commerce growth since 2019 and is rapidly becoming a leading fast-moving consumer goods brand.

2.2. SHEIN's Global Expansion

After more than 10 years of accumulation and development, relying on the trend of digitalization and globalization, relying on diversified marketing strategies and supply chain management, SHEIN has become an iconic brand in the fast fashion industry, with business oriented to the United States, Russia, Europe, the Middle East, and other markets, covering more than 230 countries and regions now [4].

2.3. The Current Situation and Characteristics of the SHEIN Brand

2.3.1. Market Position and Target Consumer of SHEIN

SHEIN has a unique and precise market positioning, it focuses on low-priced fast fashion clothing. SHEIN's target customer group is Generation Z women who pursue fashion [5]. They are price-sensitive to fashion and pursue personalization and differentiation of clothing. Secondly, SHEIN provides competitively priced products, precisely targeting price-sensitive female customers. In addition, SHEIN conducts content marketing through digital channels such as social media to enhance consumers' brand awareness and purchasing awareness.

2.3.2. Brand Core Values and Market Performance

SHEIN's value proposition is to solve the fashion industry's problem of matching supply and demand by establishing a new customer-driven fashion business model and providing customers with high-quality and low-price products [6]. As of 2024, SHEIN has become the most Google-searched clothing brand in the world, the largest fast-fashion retailer in the United States, and one of the most popular shopping apps in the world [7].

3. The Application of Content Marketing Strategies in the Process of SHEIN Brand Building

3.1. Introduction to Content Marketing Strategy

Content marketing strategies aim to engage consumers and build positive relationships with brands by surrounding them with core content that makes them more likely to purchase products from the brand, making collaboration and brand loyalty possible [1]. For SHEIN, its goal content marketing strategy is to engage content creators and real-time consumers to create compelling stories about its products through blogs, articles, and videos, and to enhance the brand's customer engagement [8]. Content marketing can create a competitive advantage for a business as it creates product leads [9]. Generally, in content marketing strategies, categories are divided into user-generated content (UGC), occupationally generated content (OGC), and professional-generated content (PGC) [10]. The research will primarily concentrate on User-Generated Content (UGC), the majority of which is closely associated with the brand and produces significant value in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions.

3.2. SHEIN's Content Marketing Strategies

3.2.1. User-Generated Content (UGC) Marketing of SHEIN

SHEIN cleverly uses content marketing to help customer retention, especially, when it promotes itself by utilizing user-generated content. Compared with celebrity endorsement, UGC shows more trust. When a large number of users have the same evaluation, people will be more enthusiastic about participating or purchasing, and their credibility will be higher [8]. SHEIN encourages users to create "haul videos" showing their purchases, a clever content marketing strategy that brings the brand to life through authentic customer experiences. These videos not only demonstrate people's unique shopping experiences with SHEIN's products but also add a personal touch and realistic touch to the brand. In this case, when customers are invited to brand content marketing, they also "co-create" or derive value from their interactions. Customers' experimental involvement in a brand will positively affect their brand loyalty [11].

3.2.2. Vibrant Online Community of SHEIN

In addition, SHEIN takes this customer's brand engagement one step further by connecting and nurturing a vibrant online community. This community serves as a platform for customers to share their stories, style tips, and haul videos and creates a sense of brand belonging and identity. SHEIN is committed to fostering this inclusive environment to reap the rewards of customer loyalty and brand advocacy. In other words, this engagement creates value for the brand. This is the practice of consumers co-creating or gaining value in the brand community through social networking, community engagement, impression management, and brand usage [11].

3.2.3. Influencer Marketing of SHEIN

SHEIN uses influencer marketing as a key strategy. Micro-influencer marketing, which is also called KOCs (Key Opinion Customers), is a strategy based on a large group of consumers. This business partnership model has proven to be effective and profitable in China. When it comes to selecting influencers, unlike companies that prefer Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), SHEIN prefers those who have acquired the same belief in autonomy as SHEIN, that they can be lesser-known influencers and satisfied customers who have previously used their services with someone who may not be famous but is appropriate and qualified. Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs) possess the unique capability to reduce the distance between a brand and its target market. These individuals are adept at linking the brand's offerings to real-life situations, thereby establishing the authenticity of the brand's fundamental values. As a result, Generation Z will find SHEIN to be a highly suitable clothing option, thanks to the influence of KOCs [5]. This case study highlights the importance of leveraging user-generated content, fostering an engaged online community and influencer marketing to strengthen brand identity and customer loyalty, and influence customers' purchase decisions. SHEIN's approach serves as a blueprint for brand recognition seeking to connect with their audience on a deeper, more personal level. These methods not only enhance the customer experience but also solidify the brand's position as a trusted and personal fashion for the modern shopper. These content marketing strategies collectively contribute to SHEIN's success in the highly competitive fashion retail market.

4. Analysis of the Impact of Digital Content Marketing on Consumer Perception

4.1. The Main Factors that Influence Customers' Purchase Intention

Digital content marketing is all marketing-related activities conducted through digital platforms [12]. Different from traditional marketing and advertising, the reason why customers are attracted by digital content marketing is that digital content marketing creates value for them, and this value experience potentially positively affects consumers' brand loyalty and purchase intention [3,11]. By reviewing past research literature, it is known that, in general, the factors affecting e-commerce and consumer purchase intention are divided into the following points: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, subjective norms, trust, and payment methods [13]. In this article, the author mainly explores how SHEIN affects consumers' subjective norms and trust through digital content marketing, thereby affecting consumers' purchase intentions.

4.2. Methods in which Digital Content Marketing Influences Consumer Intentions

4.2.1. Social Media Platforms for SHEIN to Influence Customer

SHEIN's content marketing through social media has an impact on consumer purchase intentions, especially subjective norms and trust in the brand. Subjective norms are one of the important factors that influence consumers' purchasing intentions and behaviors. They represent a person's values and

opinions. Subjective norms will have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention [13]. SHEIN has created an account matrix and established main accounts on world-renowned social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and TikTok to display the brand image. It is also based on the market characteristics of different countries and regions and the diversity of clothing product types. SHEIN carefully planned an account matrix consisting of more than 80 sub-accounts. SHEIN's account matrix ensures that each sub-account can specifically serve specific target customer groups through the precise drainage of the main account to meet their personalized needs [14]. In addition, users are encouraged to post content related to SHEIN products on social media. This kind of UGC provides subjective norms to viewers or new users, giving them a positive brand impression of SHEIN. In addition, due to the characteristics of UGC itself, it will also help users to trust SHEIN. Trust is an important belief for e-commerce. Research supports the beneficial impact of trust on customers' online purchase intentions [13]. When there is a large degree of uncertainty, the importance of trust increases. Therefore, when a brand develops through social media, it can attract customers through effective and positive content generation.

4.2.2. Searching Engine Optimization (SEO)

SHEIN has invested heavily in search engine optimization, and its CEO Chris Xu is also an expert in the field, which is one of the reasons for its success. The SHEIN team optimized the site by analyzing social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest and identifying and ranking popular search terms. While conducting SEO, SHEIN also implements content marketing within the web pages and creates quality articles in fashion, etc. In addition, SHEIN works hard on-page optimization and link building. Through the aforementioned strategies, SHEIN has reaped generous returns in SEO, with a significant increase in website traffic, as well as an excellent expansion in brand exposure and brand impressions, which has aided the implementation of SHEIN's content marketing strategy [15].

4.2.3. Digital Marketing Based on Big Data

SHEIN uses big data technology to conduct data analysis to predict clothing trends, and understanding customer preferences and needs is also one of the reasons for its success [5]. SHEIN uses big data technology to conduct data analysis to predict clothing trends, and understanding customer preferences and needs is also one of the reasons for its success. In its initial stage, SHEIN used web crawling tools such as Google's Trend Finder to collect data on products related to user preferences, analyzed popular fashion elements in different countries, and conducted precise digital marketing through fashion trend predictions. After the brand influence expanded and the user base increased, SHEIN dug deep into the user characteristics data in the brand's independent websites and mobile applications to analyze and study the preferences of consumers in different markets to guide research and development design. This kind of digital marketing based on customer behavior data can often accurately capture user preferences and provide them with new designs in a short time. SHEIN also innovatively applies the business model of "small orders and quick responses", which can quickly get products to customers while also reducing inventory pressure [14].

4.3. SHEIN's Overall Operation of Digital Content Marketing
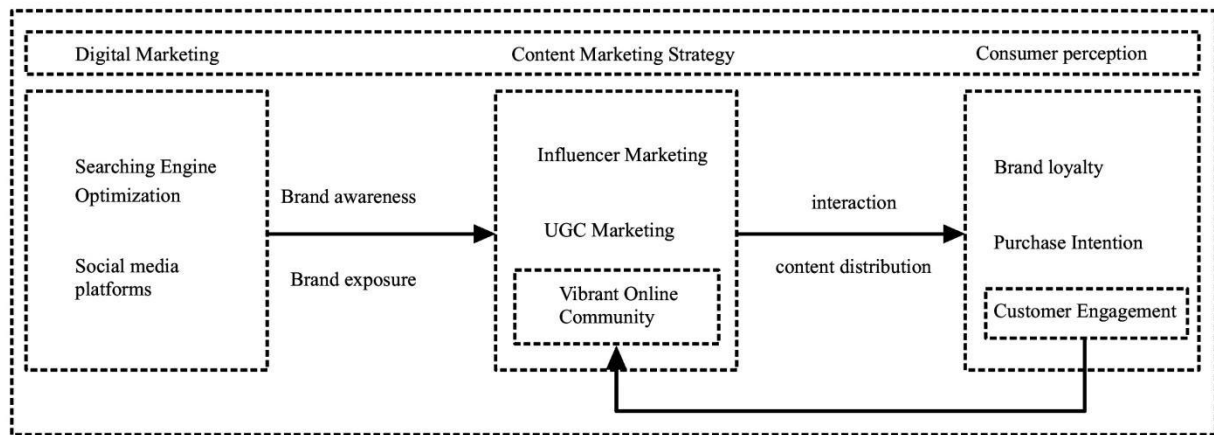

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

SHEIN's digital content marketing operates as a whole. The perceptual map in Fig. 1 explains this. SHEIN first uses digital marketing such as SEO and social media channels to increase brand recognition, brand exposure, and user brand awareness. Secondly, SHEIN uses clever content marketing such as UGC marketing, creating online brand-sharing communities, and celebrity marketing to spread effective content to increase customer entry, interact with users, improve user stickiness, and retain customers. Through the above marketing strategies, customer perception will be affected to a certain extent, purchase intention will be enhanced, and old customers will generate content to feed back the brand. It is precisely because of this entire framework, and with the accumulation of time, users, and content, that SHEIN's business continues to expand and achieve success.

5. Conclusion

After an in-depth analysis of the SHEIN brand's long-term development strategy, particularly its innovative practices in digital content marketing and social media marketing, this study reveals to companies how the brand can achieve sustained growth in value in the digital age. SHEIN's success is no accident. It has successfully built a strong brand influence on social media platforms under its precise insight into user needs and innovative marketing strategies. Through user-generated content (UGC), SHEIN not only enhances consumers' awareness and impression of the brand but also greatly stimulates their desire to purchase. This social media-based digital content marketing strategy has not only generated huge market returns for SHEIN but also laid a solid foundation for its global presence. However, SHEIN's success does not depend solely on its strong supply chain system. More importantly, it has a deep understanding of the needs and behavior patterns of consumers in the digital age and has gradually expanded its market share through differentiated competition and innovative marketing strategies. This consumer-centric, data-driven marketing strategy has provided valuable inspiration for traditional companies and overseas brands. This study also points out some of the shortcomings of the current research, especially in terms of data support and consumer cognitive analysis. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of digital content marketing on consumer behavior, future research needs to further strengthen empirical research and use new technologies and methods to explore the mysteries. To sum up, SHEIN's case provides other companies with a valuable reference, showing how brands can achieve sustained growth in value through content marketing and digital channel selection in the digital era. The author hopes that more companies and brands can

learn from it, formulate appropriate marketing strategies based on their characteristics, and jointly promote the progress and development of the industry.

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