

Corporate Marketing Strategies for Modern Short Video Platforms in the Perspective of 4I Theory

--Take Douyin (Chinese TikTok) as an Example

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Abstract: With the continuous development of the Internet, short video platforms have become an integral part of people's daily lives. In such an environment, the corporate marketing strategy of a short video platform determines whether it can stand out among its competitors. Douyin, which has grown from a late-comer in the short-video field to the head of the pack today, and is bound to have its own unique take on corporate marketing strategies. This paper will mainly use the literature review method to analyse the corporate marketing strategy of Douyin short video platform based on the 4I theory, namely Interesting, Interests, Interaction and Individually. In terms of Interesting, Douyin introduces original product features to attract users; in terms of Inter-ests, Douyin provides direct economic benefits and public welfare value to users; in terms of interaction, communication between Douyin officials and users, and between users and users are smooth and friendly; in terms of Individually, Douyin can accurately recommend videos that meet users' tastes and achieve effective advertising.

Keywords: Douyin, short video platform, marketing strategy

1. Introduction

Nowadays, with the continuous development of technology, the pace of life has been accelerating, prompting society to enter the "fast era". The hectic work life has increased the demand for fragmented entertainment, which has led to the rise of the short video industry. According to QuestMobile's "2022 China Mobile Internet Annual Report", the active penetration rate of the short video app industry has been maintained at over 75%, and the average monthly per capita usage time in 2022 could reach nearly 60 hours (Fig.1).

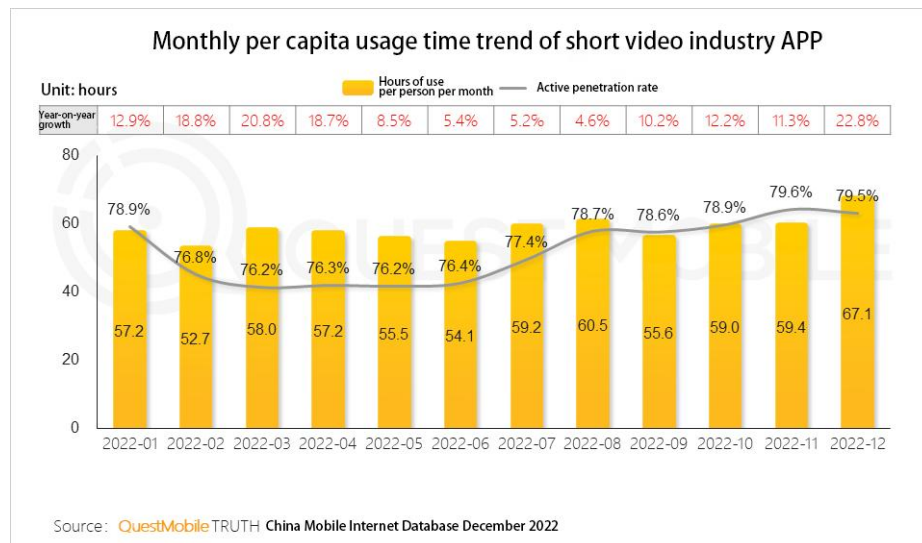


Figure 1: Monthly per capita usage time trend in the short video APP industry.

Among the many short video platforms, Douyin is in a relatively leading position in the Chinese market. It is one of the largest short video platforms in the world, with a wide user base and a very high influence.

At Douyin, users can shoot videos by choosing songs, filters, or special effects. Users can also discover and follow other users' video content and personal pages, interact and share their favourite videos, as well as participate in various challenges on the platform to express their creativity and attitude.

In addition, Douyin is also very active in commercialisation and advertising realisation, providing a new advertising channel and business opportunity for companies. Brands can post interesting and vivid short videos to promote their brand image and products on Douyin, thus further increasing brand awareness and corporate revenue.

In an environment where short-form video continues to boom, the competition for short-form video platforms is fierce. Therefore, how to increase the competitiveness of enterprises through marketing strategies and stand out among the crowd of homogeneous brands has also become a key task for short video platforms. As the head enterprise of the short video platform, the analysis of its marketing strategy is of great significance to both Douyin itself and other short video platforms.

This study will use the review research method to discuss and analyse corporate marketing strategies for Douyin in the context of 4I theory by using specific methods means reading and summarising relevant literature. This paper will first discuss the 4I marketing theory, the findings of the literature review of Douyin and other short video platforms, then discuss the analysis of Douyin marketing based on the 4I theory, then analyse the case of Douyin's content operation marketing, and finally draw conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of 4I Marketing Theory and its Overall Application

The 4I theory, a combination of the initials Interesting, Interests, Interaction and Individually, is a framework for marketing strategy, also known as Internet marketing theory, proposed by Don E. Schultz, a professor of marketing at Northwestern University in the 1990s [1]. It emphasises the need for companies to gain a competitive advantage in the digital age by meeting customer needs through Interesting, Interests, Interaction, and Individual.

There have been many scholars who have combined with 4I theory with marketing in their research. For example, studying the impact of book marketing on short video platforms in the publishing industry. Over the analysis based on the 4I theory perspective, corresponding conclusions can be drawn and existing problems and insights can be identified [2].

As a whole, the 4I marketing theory means that in the Internet era, a company's marketing and advertising must be interesting enough, needing to combine visual and auditory sensory experiences and use creative aesthetics to arouse the audience's interest. Secondly, in addition to caring for the direct benefits that product services bring to users, companies should also care for their information needs, and psychological emotions or bring a broader value to public welfare [2]. Again, communication is an integral part of marketing. Treating the consumer as a subject and developing an equal and interactive communication between them and the company helps users to gain a deeper understanding of the product and gives marketing a unique competitive advantage. On the other hand, by collecting and analysing data, companies can provide personalised services to different users and launch targeted marketing.

In terms of the application of the 4I theory, marketing analysis based on the 4I theory has been applied in many different market consumption areas. For example, the food, make-up, and clothing industries and other consumer goods industries as well as service industries. 1) In terms of Interesting, in the field of short video platforms, it is very important for the platforms to be creative in their features, ways of entertainment and the creativity of the advertisements placed. Only by maintaining interest can they better attract and retain users and obtain better marketing results. 2) In terms of Interests, successful short videos can bring users high levels of buzz and attention, bringing direct economic benefits to users, and search engines on short video platforms can provide indirect value by providing users with the information they want. Furthermore, according to the underlying logic of the business model, the ultimate goal of any business action is to reach profitability. Therefore, the inclusion of interests into the consideration of marketing content can help maintain the business value of the enterprise. 3) In terms of interaction, timely communication between the short video platform and users can help the platform further improve its own services, and users can also reap a great sense of respect and participation in this process, while friendly communication between users and users helps platforms form a good ecology, thus attracting more users to join them and forming a virtuous cycle. (4) In terms of Individually, the recommendation algorithm of the short video platform can analyse user preferences through data such as user browsing, likes, purchase records, and precisely deliver videos or advertisements with relevant needs to users to achieve personalised services.

2.2. Introduction and Macro Comparison of Domestic and International Short Video Platforms

Short video platforms in China. Due to the explosion of short videos, domestic short video platforms have emerged, including Douyin, Kuaishou, Volcano, Tencent's Weishi and other various platforms. However, at present, the domestic short video field in China is basically a bipolar trend, and the only one that can form a competitive relationship with Douyin is Kuaishou.

With the tagline "Record the good life", Douyin aims to create a short music video platform for young people by allowing users to share the good, high-quality content they see. Videos on Douyin are presented in the form of trendy music, dance and performance. With the platform's original special effects and filters, they are often able to create star singles and spread quickly with the help of centralised recommendation mechanism. On Douyin platform, there is no upper limit to the heat of a video. High popularity brings users more exposure, allowing popular videos to gain more attention and a better chance of becoming super hits, so most of the clicks and attention are concentrated on the head users. According to the current base of the Douyin platform's followers'

distribution, this centralised algorithm generally makes it difficult for ordinary grassroots makers to be noticed. But Douyin supports the purchase of traffic for promotion. Users can choose the direction they wish to boost their data, the duration of the placement and the way they place it, and get a corresponding boost in play by purchasing different amounts of "DOU+". In other words, as long as the user invests money in the platform, the theoretical amount of exposure is determined by the backend mechanism.

On the contrary, the tagline of Kuaishou is "Record the world, record you", which aims to encourage all users to record their real daily lives and express themselves, creating a civilian community to record and share their production and lives. Videos on Kuaishou are simpler, and the threshold for recording videos is even lower. In most cases, video creators do not need to prepare carefully and can reflect the most real life. On Kuaishou, when a video reaches a certain threshold of hotness, its chances of exposure will continue to decrease. Therefore, Kuaishou's decentralised recommendation mechanism will give every user an equal chance to be seen.

Foreign short video platforms. The major foreign short video platforms are almost monopolised by TikTok, YouTube and Instagram.

TikTok is the official overseas version of Douyin, which is aimed at overseas users in non-Chinese regions and is similar to the Chinese version in terms of features and content, but has also been adapted and optimised for local tastes and habits in terms of music material and popular culture. It has become one of the most popular social media platforms for young people in many countries and regions.

YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing website. Users can upload, share and watch all types of video content on YouTube, including music, movies, TV shows, personal vlogs, food, travel, education and more. In addition, YouTube offers YouTube Premium, a paid subscription service, and YouTube Kids, a programme designed for children, to cater to different user groups.

Instagram is now similar in scale to TikTok in that users can upload photos or videos and follow content shared by other users [3]. Instagram offers a variety of filters and editing tools that allow users to make pictures and videos more beautiful and interesting. In addition, Instagram allows users to find like-minded people by sorting them by hashtags and themes.

According to Apptopia, TikTok is the world's leading mobile app in terms of downloads in 2022, with 672 million downloads, ahead of Instagram in second place at 124 million.

Overall, for a single country base, short video platforms in China have a much larger user base and a much larger market size as well as depth, with a bias towards a diverse range of videos. Foreign short video platforms focus more on highly original content and have a relatively less regulated environment so that users can create content relatively more freely.

2.3. The Overall Development of Douyin and its Current Status

Douyin's corporate development as a whole can be summarized into three main stages: In the first stage, Douyin sets the tone of the product. On September 26, 2016, version 1.0.0 of Douyin was officially released. According to Aurora Big Data, from January 2016 to January 2017, in the short video market, Kuaishou's market penetration rate was at the forefront, and its market penetration rate was much greater than the sum of all other similar APP penetration rates, so it was clear that Kuaishou already had a strong presence. Unlike Kuaishou's aim of targeting third- and fourth-tier urban groups and creating a platform for ordinary people to record their lives, Douyin cut its teeth on the segmentation direction of short music videos, combining short videos with musical elements to open up the market through a differentiation strategy [4]. Douyin's users is mainly concentrated in first- and second-tier cities, young, fashion-conscious, like new things, dare to experiment, and have high requirements for the quality of videos. This also determines that Douyin will adopt a

different centralised algorithm from that of Kuaishou, bringing more exposure to high-trending users.

In the second stage, Douyin focused on marketing operations to achieve user accumulation. Douyin undertook extensive advertising, and through its strong sponsorship of mainstream domestic variety shows and inviting celebrities to join it, Douyin's user base was greatly boosted and it was among the top products in its genre. At this stage, Douyin was also exploring new profit models. Not only has it developed a live-streaming function, but it has also partnered with local brands such as Harbin Beer and Chevrolet for advertising. At the same time, Douyin strengthened the supervision of the platform ecology, optimising the commenting and reporting functions, launching an anti-addiction system, blocking unscrupulous accounts, and releasing overseas versions, including international, Japanese and Korean versions, which attracted a large number of overseas users. As a result, Douyin's popularity and usage rate have been greatly increased.

The third phase of Douyin gets a huge boost in e-commerce. Douyin Online Shop was launched on October 30, 2020. As a result of the new crown epidemic, Douyin jumped up to become one of the top e-commerce platforms in China. Because everyone was quarantined at home, everyone paid a lot of attention to Douyin, which made Douyin's users much stickier, especially those middle-aged and elderly people who joined, which made Douyin's traffic skyrocket, even rivalling old e-commerce platforms such as Taobao. After that, Douyin used the "live streaming + short video" approach to bring merchants and users closer together. In addition, Douyin also responded to the national policy of supporting rural revitalization with e-commerce, which attracted more users to start paying attention to the platform. According to data released by Douyin, in 2022, 6.27 million video authors turned their content into cash through Douyin's e-commerce, with a cumulative turnover of more than 15 billion units (this data comes from the enterprise's online data reporting).

According to the latest figures released by Zhang Nan, who is the president of Douyin, the number of Douyin users reached 809 million as of January 2023. In China, Douyin has over 150 million daily active users and 300 million monthly active users, and has topped the app shops in over 40 countries. According to the statistics of Mobile APP iIndex in iResearch, in March 2023, the number of unique monthly devices of Douyin was as high as 89.71 million units, much higher than the 47.891 million units of the same short video leader, Kuaishou. The year-on-year increase of 4.57% was similarly higher than Kuaishou's 3.71% [5,6]. It is evident that Douyin, as a later entrant to the short video market, has already completed its overtaking of Kuaishou.

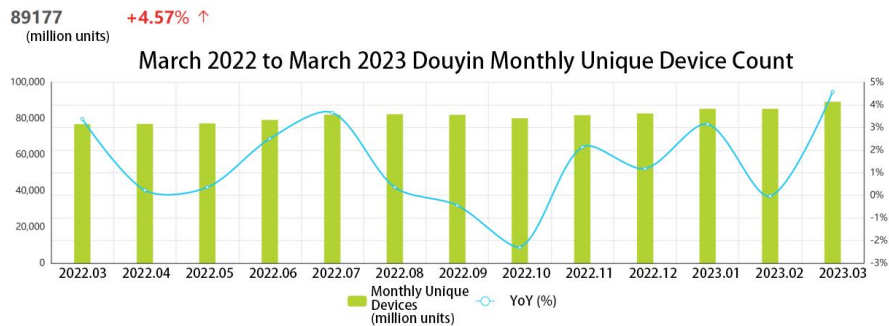


Figure 2: Number of unique monthly devices for Douyin short videos, iIndex, March 2023 [5].

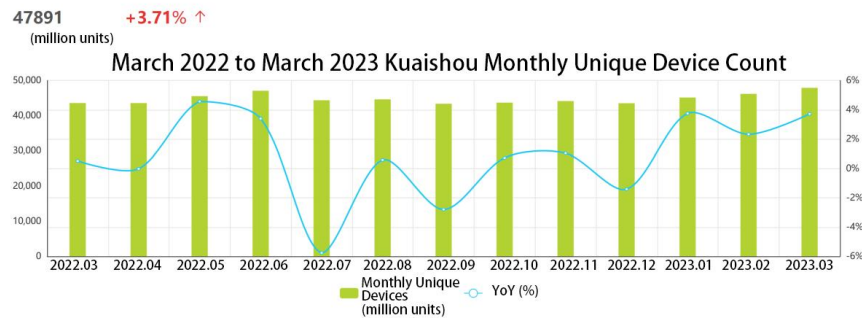


Figure 3: Number of monthly unique devices for Kuaishou, iRIndex, March 2023 [6].

3. Analysis of Douyin Marketing Based on 4I Theory

3.1. Marketing Strategies Based on Interesting

Interesting Filters and Special Effects. Nowadays, more and more camera filter shooting tools and beauty apps are appearing at the top of the charts in the major app shops and are popular among women. Douyin has also seized the opportunity to develop many original filters, effects and other gadgets. Filter effects and various cool video stickers and props can provide users with more interesting effects for their short video shoots, making videos more creative, thus making up for the lack of user shots and ideas, lowering the threshold of use and allowing the general public to make popular videos [7].

Interesting Challenge Activities. Douyin has been launching fun challenges where users can participate by recording videos related to the challenges. Through this interesting approach, Douyin has stimulated users' creativity and enthusiasm and increased their stickiness. 2019 Chinese New Year, Douyin joined hands with CCTV Spring Festival Gala, and launched games such as a pass to win red packets and topic challenges [8]. According to the official "2019 Spring Festival Big Data Report" released by DouYin, over 61.14 million users received DouYin's red packets, the total number of video plays related to the event exceeded 24.7 billion, and the number of people involved in filming reached 3.37 million. The number of viewers of the 2019 Spring Festival Gala also reached another record high, reaching a double win [8].

3.2. Marketing Strategies Based on Interests

Economic Benefits from Network Traffic. The Douyin platform has many ways to get money, and the huge user size and internet traffic that comes with the platform allow many users to catch the business opportunity. By shooting videos, you have the opportunity to win followers and internet traffic. Once you have a traffic base, you can work with manufacturers to promote their products and earn advertising money through ad placements. Depending on the profile of the fans and the interaction rate of the account, the income from advertising by Douyin celebrities can range from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands of RMB. The Douyin science account "BaiPiaoDeZhiShi" often shares problems and solutions that it encounters in life. According to the star chart in Douyin, "BaiPiaoDeZhiShi" is currently offering 2.6W to 4.6W per ad and has already received 11 ads, which is a significant amount of income. Users can also earn rewards from viewers through live streaming, which can be converted directly into RMB. If you are a merchant, you can also live stream to increase the sales of your products.

Showing Commitment to Public Service. On September 5, 2022, Douyin launched the "DOU Love Charity Day" campaign on China Charity Day, launching the "Little Sun" IP [9]. For three consecutive days, Douyin live-streamed the event, mobilizing hundreds of millions of users to

participate in the filming of short public service videos [9]. Douyin broke people's established perceptions of public welfare marketing with its innovative form of public welfare, cleverly using the platform's own long-accumulated huge user base to quickly attract the attention of people across the country, and successfully leveraged the flow to break the circle, establish a good brand image and achieve the effect of brand premium [9].

3.3. Marketing Strategy Based on Interaction

Interaction between the Platform and Users. The Douyin platform places great emphasis on interactivity between the officials and users, which is one of Douyin's strengths. From time to time, Douyin officials will post interactive activities and interactive topics on the platform, and users will also receive rewards for posting videos, commenting, liking or sharing. Douyin also sometimes recommends promising users and helps these people to expand their influence. In addition, Douyin officials have been communicating with users through platform tweets and in-station messages, keeping them informed of the latest developments and promotion policies of the platform, etc. In addition, the Douyin platform also updates some topic list rankings from time to time, so that users and creators can watch the hottest and most creative videos anytime and anywhere, thus helping the platform to generate natural traffic.

Interaction between Users and Users. In Douyin, interaction is free, and the autonomous interaction between users makes Douyin a unique, fun and relaxed platform ecology. Users can like, comment and send messages to each other, as well as follow their favourite short video bloggers and receive timely and relevant tweets. The high-quality content created by the bloggers attracts more users to watch it, and a large number of likes and rewards from the platform will further motivate the bloggers to create more quality content, which in turn is the fundamental reason why users want to stay in Douyin, thus forming a relatively benign closed cycle.

3.4. Marketing Strategies Based on Individually

In the process of marketing on short video platforms, accurate positioning of users is very important. On the one hand, it can correctly understand the target users' interests and purchasing power and other information, and better develop marketing strategies; on the other hand, accurate user positioning can also improve user experience and avoid irrelevant advertisements interfering with users' viewing. By digging deeper into user profiles and behaviour, building data models and constantly improving its products and services, Douyin has formed a mature and accurate recommendation mechanism. Based on users' interests and interaction behaviours, Douyin will recommend the video content that best suits their tastes. This precise recommendation strategy not only allows users to have a special personalised experience, but also enables effective advertising, bringing more accurate and effective exposure to advertisers.

4. Discussion and Analysis of Specific Cases of Douyin's Content Operation Marketing

4.1. Cooperation Between Enterprises: Douyin + ele.me

Since 2018, Douyin has been trying to enter the local life sector [10]. With the advent of the new crown pneumonia epidemic in 2020, merchants' offline operations have been hit hard, so Douyin has become a lifesaver for many small and medium-sized businesses. Not only has Douyin's live e-commerce been growing rapidly, but Douyin's local life services have also grown by leaps and bounds [10]. Douyin's city life page covers many types of in-store group purchase packages but few delivery services to home [10].

On August 19, 2022, Douyin officially announced its cooperation with ele.me [10]. Through its built-in applet platform in Douyin, ele.me provides local lifestyle services, including content collection, online ordering and real-time delivery to Douyin users [11]. This app can be synced to the user data of the ele.me app, and users can place takeaway orders directly through the app. On the other hand, Douyin links its merchandising function with ele.me's takeaway service. Users can watch the short video and click on the link to go directly to the ele.me takeaway platform to place orders for the recommended products, further facilitating the conversion of traffic.

Through the collaboration, Douyin and ele.me are jointly innovating and exploring a new "social e-commerce" model that empowers both merchants and users. At the same time, joint marketing between the two sides has jointly achieved traffic interchange and improved user retention and consumption experience, creating a new win-win model.

4.2. User UGC Content: "Challenge" of Beijing Traditional Drink Soybean Juice

At the beginning of 2023, a tourist visiting Beijing posted a video of himself tasting the traditional Soybean juice on Douyin, which accidentally went viral because of its funny reaction, sparking a craze for bean juice challenges across the Internet and making it another hit in 2023. The challenge involved short video bloggers with millions of followers, as well as ordinary people who were curious to try it out. The background music used in the initial video, "Junior· Beijing", also became the background music for the challenge. Months later, visitors are still coming to try this Beijing specialty.

User-generated UGC content like the bean juice challenge can enrich Douyin's content pool and make the content on Douyin more diverse. Secondly, it can also bring in a large amount of user attention and user activity. At the same time, UGC content can also promote users' creativity and desire to express themselves, allowing them to engage more actively with the platform and increase user retention.

4.3. Corporate Marketing on Douyin: Florasis

Florasis is a Chinese make-up brand that has been present on the Douyin platform since May 2020 and has multiple accounts sending different types of content that complement each other for marketing purposes [12]. In product showcase videos, Florasis promotes mainly around the brand's popular products, detailing their efficacy and how to use them. In the instructional videos, Florasis will share some make-up techniques to create a complete make-up look with its own products, which can launch the product kits and increase the brand's awareness at the same time. In addition, Florasis will collaborate with celebrities and ask them to post relevant content on their own Douyin accounts to enhance the brand's reach.

As of February 28, 2022, Florasis's GMV on Douyin has exceeded 120 million and has 78.66 million followers. Judging from the above figures, Florasis's marketing on Douyin has achieved quite good results [12]. In addition, many international brands such as Cartier, Estee Lauder and CHARLES & KEITH have completed their official presence on Douyin. Among them, Estee Lauder has been able to increase its sales and expand its brand influence through open-screen immersive advertising on Douyin and live-streaming with goods, and the number of fans of its official account has now exceeded 4 million. Real-time data from CHARLES & KEITH's live-streaming room can reach the top 30 in Douyin's flagship list.

5. Conclusion

This study introduces the 4I theory and the Douyin short video platform, and analyses the marketing strategies of companies on the Douyin short video platform based on the 4I theory in four aspects:

Interesting, Interests, Interaction and Individually. In addition, this study also cites three examples of content marketing on the Douyin platform. Judging from the size of Douyin's users today, Douyin's corporate marketing strategy is undoubtedly successful. The company's current marketing strategies have fixed Douyin as the absolute leader among homogenous apps. However, the analysis in this paper only stops at studying Douyin's internet traffic and user base, but does not dig deeper into Douyin's user profile and behavioural habits. In subsequent research, this study suggests that a more accurate analysis can be obtained by building models, distributing questionnaires, and studying user-profiles and behavioural habits in depth, in an attempt to harvest more accurate and highly personalised findings.

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