

Analysis of Pixar Movie Marketing Strategy Based on 5T Theory: Take Turning Red as an Example

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Abstract: This study introduces the brand background of Pixar Animation Film Company and analyzes its marketing strategy using the 5T theory. This study chooses Turning Red as a case study, and through the analysis of its marketing strategy, some shortcomings are found. First, through the analysis of Tools, "Turning Red" failed to meet the audience in cinemas, which led to the disappointment of some fans. Although Pixar and Disney used multi-platform and multi-channel promotional tools, their marketing effect was reduced due to some limitations. Second, for Tracking, although Pixar registered separate social media accounts for each movie, there was relatively little in-depth analysis and response to user feedback. This makes it difficult for the company to fully understand the audience's needs and expectations. Based on these findings, this study makes some recommendations to improve Pixar's marketing strategy. This study makes recommendations to strengthen the multi-platform and multi-channel marketing approach and enhance user feedback analysis. These recommendations are expected to help Pixar further improve the marketing effectiveness of its films, increase audience engagement and satisfaction, and contribute to the company's continued growth.

Keywords: Pixar Animation, Turning Red, 5T theory, marketing strategy analysis

1. Introduction

As an important cultural medium, the film has an entertainment function and can convey ideas, resonate and influence society. In today's era of digitalization and globalization, the film industry is faced with tremendous opportunities and challenges. Audience needs and consumption behaviors have changed profoundly, and the traditional film marketing model is gradually losing its appeal to audiences. As a result, filmmakers and marketers need to constantly innovate and adapt marketing strategies to increase film exposure, engage audiences and drive box office success.

There are many well-known animation companies, but Pixar is the only emerging company that used technological innovation to shock audiences in a short period. Even during a serious financial crisis, Pixar managed to go public and raise a lot of money. Pixar's films are all original self-produced works, both in terms of content and design, Pixar is hands-on, and shows the audience a rare blend of the real and the fantastic. This made Disney impressed and was eventually acquired by Disney for a whopping \$7.4 billion[1]. Since then, Pixar still maintains its original work mode and style and remains an independent subject in the Disney company.

Thanks to the application of computer technology, animation films in the new era have overturned traditional thinking and concepts, changed the past mode of communication, and brought a whole new sensory stimulation to human beings. Animation derivative products are emerging, and many film production companies are beginning to be attracted by this new market and have entered the animation industry, bringing a new round of challenges to the whole industry. The industry is facing various conflicts, such as the competition between traditional production methods and high-tech creation techniques, the competition between animation films from East and West, and the competition between animation production companies within each country, etc. In the face of such a situation, the animation industry will become a hot area of public attention.

In the past few years, Pixar Films has received a lot of attention for its emerging film marketing strategy. By creating interactivity, emotional resonance, and immersive experiences, Pixar films bring audiences into the virtual world of the film, thus enhancing audience engagement and loyalty[2]. Compared with traditional advertising campaigns, Pixar films focus more on building the film's brand image, storyline, and characters as a way to attract the audience's attention and engagement. However, despite the potential and innovation of Pixar's film marketing strategies, research on their use and effectiveness in practice has been relatively limited.

In this context, this study chooses *Turning Red* as the research object, aiming to investigate the construction and implementation process of Pixar's film marketing strategy by literature review based on the 5T theory and analyze its impact on the audience. As a Pixar movie full of interactive and virtual experiences, *Turning Red* has successfully attracted the attention of the audience and achieved commercial success. Through an in-depth analysis of this film's marketing strategy, this study can reveal the effectiveness and feasibility of Pixar's film marketing strategy from both theoretical and practical perspectives, and provide valuable insights and practical suggestions for film producers and marketers.

To sum up, this study aims to reveal the process of constructing and implementing the marketing strategy of Pixar films, as well as the impact and effect of the strategy on the audience, through the case study of *Turning Red*, based on the 5T theory. Through an in-depth study of the marketing strategies of Pixar films, this study will provide the film industry with innovative marketing ideas and practical guidance to promote the development of the film industry.

2. The Brand Background of Pixar Animation

The first animated film produced by Pixar was an unprecedented success when it was released. This also made many in the industry less skeptical of Pixar. Its artistic style was different from the cartoons created by other companies, showing its unique realism and storytelling. Since then, Pixar's animation has always been branded with computer technology. As each work has been recognized by the audience, people subconsciously formed a fixed thinking that as long as they mention Pixar, people will think of computer animation[3]. There is no doubt that Pixar has become another company that has changed the path of animation development in addition to Disney.

2.1. Overview of Pixar Brand Development

Graphics and Imaging Laboratory in a garage on Long Island's North Shore, with Alexander Schurr, an eccentric millionaire as its investor. He wanted to rely on computers to become a successful animator like Walt Disney and was committed to the great goal of producing computer animation. 1980, the newly developed computer technology attracted the attention of the famous film producer George Lucas, who soon went to Long Island to invite the technical core of the lab, *Alway* and *Catmull*, to his film company, hoping to work together. On January 30, 1986, Pixar was officially founded. Pixar was founded on the idea of breaking through limitations to achieve the most

innovative technology. At this time, Disney began to take notice of the fledgling animation company. At the same time, Pixar was already facing a chronic financial crisis, a vulnerability that also forced Pixar to partner with Disney. In 1991, Jobs decided to take Pixar public, absorbing a large amount of speculative capital to help its development. In 1997, Pixar and Disney signed a deal to collaborate on five animated feature films. At this point, Jobs decided to register Pixar as a brand and expand commercial sales channels to gradually develop a chain of Pixar derivative products[4]. Jobs insisted that the Pixar logo be printed on all movie-related products and that it be as large as the Disney logo. Pixar's brand influence gradually increased. In 2006, Disney finally bought Pixar for a whopping \$7.4 billion, making the two giants of the animation industry into one and bringing more surprises to audiences in the future.

2.2. The Image and Value of Pixar Animation

Pixar's success is no accident. It is the result of years of combined efforts by many creative animators. Every film produced by Pixar is a masterpiece that surprises the audience. Their perfect storytelling and vivid graphics, coupled with Disney's long-established distribution mechanism, have resulted in one masterpiece after another. The individual creative style presented by Pixar animation also adds a unique brand connotation to it.

3. Pixar Movie Marketing Strategy Based on 5T Theory

The 5T theory is proposed by Andy Senowitz in his book "Word of Mouth Marketing". The 5 T's of word-of-mouth are Talkers, Topics, Tools, Taking Part, and Tracking, which are all step-by-step[5].

Talkers are the starting point for word-of-mouth marketing. People who will actively talk about the products are the fans of the product, the users, the media, and the employees. Topics give people reasons to talk. Word-of-mouth marketing is a process of hype and finding topics, and it is always important to find a gimmick that makes sense and is unexpected so that people, especially potential users, have something to talk about. Tools are the medium that helps the message spread faster. The selection of communication tools and the evaluation of their effectiveness are very important aspects. In addition, the monitoring of the message is also an important part. TakingPart is to participate in people's discussions. In fact, there is never a shortage of topics in the network, but the key is to find the contact point that matches the product value and corporate philosophy, i.e. contact point communication. Tracking is to discover and find the voice of the customer. This is a post-event monitoring link, through the discovery of some feedback and timely adjustment of product production and marketing process is extremely important.

3.1. Talkers: Fans as the Main Talkers

For Pixar animated films, for example, *Turning Red*, the main fans include parents who accompany their children to the movies and young people who like animation brands such as Disney and Pixar. According to the 5T theory, enterprises should first target specific consumer groups according to the segmented target market, and then select the target audience, that is, the talkers, as the initial generators and disseminators of the topic. Generally speaking, among the people who are suitable as movie talkers, movie fans are a category that cannot be ignored[6].

Turning Red is about the Chinese parent-child model and makes the growth of the main character the focus of the film. This has not surprisingly become a topic of conversation among parents. More importantly, young fans in a changing stage of thinking are talking about the film. As society evolves, more and more young people are developing more critical and innovative ideas

about family education and upbringing. Turning Red is an animation that accurately captures this pain point and makes young people the biggest talkers and distributors.

3.2. Topics: Select the Lines and Values of the Movie as Topics

For "Turning Red", the topics are mainly lines and values. The topic is the most important element in word-of-mouth marketing. Whether a topic is properly designed or not is directly related to the success of word-of-mouth marketing[7].

On the one hand, there are the lines. "You try to make everyone happy, but you're too hard on yourself. That's what I taught you, and I'm sorry." At the climax of the entire film, Mei Mei's mother says this to her. This left many viewers in tears of emotion. It is a lifelong desire for many people to resolve misunderstandings and conflicts with their families as they grow up. Such straightforward but powerful lines moved many viewers and quickly became one of the film's selling points. On the other hand, the film's values. In recent years, the family education model in East Asia has been discussed more and more widely and has become a hot topic in today's society. Obedience to instruction and self-seeking has become the biggest contradiction in the growth process of young people. The film "Turning Red" appropriately combines the two, showing this issue from both parents and children's perspectives, encouraging young people to face difficulties and accept themselves. Such values become the biggest highlight of the film.

3.3. Tools: Diversified Online Media Portfolio as the Main Tools

The movie "Turning Red", although did not meet the audience through the cinema for some reason, its pre-hotness still made many viewers applaud it on the streaming media platform. On top of that, Pixar did not ignore the online social media promotion.

According to Andy Senowitz, the two key points of word-of-mouth marketing communication tools are speed and convenience. The Internet is the most efficient and effective tool. It empowers talkers to speak up and have an equal dialogue, helping to make word-of-mouth marketing reach a deeper and broader audience. Young people have become the main moviegoers, and the media that this group is exposed to are mainly online. Therefore, on the whole, word-of-mouth marketing for animated movies should be based on a diversified combination of online media, supplemented by traditional media. For specific movies, Pixar Corporation also need to choose specific media according to the media exposure habits of the target consumer groups of the movie.

3.4. Taking Part: Providing Topic Material, Responding Positively, and Interacting Frequently

Active participation in customer talk helps cultivate a close relationship with customers and establish a good corporate image. For Pixar animated films, proactively providing talking points for the audience to talk about and trying to keep the audience talking enthusiastically provided them with an advantage. They listened carefully to what the audience is talking about and gave positive responses to win goodwill. At the same time, through timely and frequent interaction, they gradually cultivated a friendly and intimate relationship[8]. For example, Disney+'s Twitter account posted a short video of a few seconds on January 1, 2023. In the video, the red panda Mei Mei is happily playing with friends at midnight, while lying alone in his bedroom bed at 12:01 a.m. It shows the hidden loneliness of the main character growing up in the movie, and it matches the lives of most busy and lonely young people, touching the hearts of netizens while being witty and humorous.

3.5. Tracking: Carefully Collect and Analyze Word-of-mouth Information and Respond to it

The movie "Turning Red" did not do enough in terms of tracking. Since the movie was not shown in cinemas, it received relatively few valuable comments on social media platforms in the past. Real-time tracking of the public's word-of-mouth opinions can help companies understand and grasp the real consumer needs and psychology, and make adjustments and improvements to their marketing strategies. Animation films can strengthen the tracking of word-of-mouth information by the following ways. First, they can make use of various modern data collection and analysis tools to enhance the collection of viewers' opinions. Second, they should introduce incentives to increase the motivation and initiative of audience interactive feedback. In addition, it is also effective to carefully analyze the collected opinions and feedback, and to discuss response or improvement strategies. Although, the brand optimized its marketing strategy and increased its marketing efforts as seen in the promotional marketing of Pixar's new 2023 film "Elemental". However, the effective feedback it received from the public during the "Turning Red" stage and the corresponding improvements are still slightly lacking.

4. Integrated and Optimized Marketing Strategy for Pixar Films under the 5T Theory

The analysis above mentioned that Pixar's animated movies, especially Turning Red, are particularly deficient in two aspects, namely multiple media mix communication and marketing, and user feedback collection and analysis. And Tools and Tracking are very important for the promotion and marketing of animated movies. Therefore, this paper focuses on these two aspects to propose optimization suggestions for the marketing strategy of Pixar's animated movies.

4.1. Optimized Marketing Strategy Based on Enhanced Media Platform Marketing

In today's era of digitalization and globalization, it has become a necessary trend that the marketing of animated movies needs diversified online media as a communication platform. Here are a few specific suggestions and related practices to improve the marketing effect of animated movies.

Design fun online activities and challenges that encourage audience participation and sharing. For example, role-playing contests, art creation contests, or quizzes with prizes can be held. These activities capture the audience's attention and increase the film's exposure and create a positive word-of-mouth effect. Collaborate with popular online movie critics or bloggers and invite them to write movie reviews or participate in promotional activities. This can leverage their influence and audience base to expand the movie's exposure and awareness. Viewers are encouraged to generate and share film-related content, such as art creations, short videos, emojis, etc. This user-generated content can be shared and promoted on social media platforms to increase audience engagement and interaction. Pixar can expand its movie marketing strategy to multiple online media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, etc. They can also customize content to suit the characteristics of each platform, such as producing exciting promotional clips, creating short videos, and collaborating with online celebrities to attract a broader audience base. It is also good to use digital marketing tools for data analysis to understand the interests and behaviors of the target audience in order to precisely deliver advertisements. Targeted advertising can accurately deliver movie promotion messages to potential audiences and increase the click-through and conversion rates of advertisements.

By using diversified online media as a communication platform, the marketing of animated films can better reach the target audience and increase exposure, appeal, and engagement[9]. These practices can increase the film's visibility, expand its audience base, and lay a solid foundation for the film's box office success and brand building.

4.2. Optimized Marketing Strategy Based on Enhanced Word-of-mouth Analysis

For the marketing of animated movies, it is crucial to carefully collect and analyze word-of-mouth information and respond to it[10]. Below are a few specific suggestions to improve word-of-mouth and response strategies for animated films.

Pixar should pay close attention to social media platforms, movie review sites and online forums, etc., to collect audience comments and feedback on the movie. With the help of professional social media monitoring tools, they can track the word-of-mouth and topic discussions of movies in real-time to discover and grasp the audience's emotions and opinions promptly. The collected word-of-mouth information is subjected to sentiment analysis and keyword extraction to understand the audience's preferences and dissatisfaction with the movie. By analyzing viewers' emotions and trends, Pixar can discover the film's strengths and weaknesses, and make targeted improvements and responses accordingly. They should go further and respond positively to viewers' comments and questions on social media platforms, demonstrating that they value and care about viewers' opinions. Responses should be sincere, and friendly, and provide helpful answers or explanations. Such active participation can increase viewers' trust and goodwill and improve the film's word-of-mouth image. Negative comments and controversies that arise should not be ignored or avoided, but should be responded to and explained on time. It is essential to face negative comments positively and provide reasonable explanations and improvement measures to respond to viewers' concerns and dissatisfaction. Demonstrating respect and sincerity to the audience will help regain their trust and regain word of mouth.

By carefully collecting and analyzing word-of-mouth information and responding to it flexibly, animated films can more accurately grasp audience preferences and expectations and improve audience satisfaction with the films, thus promoting successful marketing and sustainable development of the films.

5. Conclusion

This study uses the 5T theoretical model to analyze the marketing strategy of Pixar's animated film, using Turning Red as an example. Although on the whole Turning Red's marketing strategy is successful, it is slightly lacking in some aspects. In terms of Tools, due to the spread of the epidemic virus and certain other reasons, Turning Red was not able to meet the audience in the cinema. This makes many fans who are ready to go to the cinema feel very sorry. And, as a result, even though both Pixar and Disney have used multiple platforms and channels to promote it, its marketing effect has declined. In addition, in terms of Tracking, although each of Pixar's animated films has registered a separate social media account for interaction with fans, more in-depth analysis and response about user feedback is not common. This is a common problem for large studios. They often feel confident because of their experience, and to some extent ignore their audience's feelings. Therefore, they need to pay more attention to the collection and analysis of word-of-mouth information to better understand the audience's feedback and expectations. To address these issues, this paper makes the following suggestions. First, Pixar could further develop interesting and diverse ways to promote the film to attract more viewers' attention and participation. This could include posting engaging trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, and character profiles on social media platforms, as well as collaborating with relevant brands to launch co-branded collaborative products or hold offline events. Secondly, Pixar needs to strengthen the collection and analysis of word-of-mouth information by observing audience feedback on platforms such as social media, review sites, and online forums to understand audience comments and opinions and to respond and address them promptly. This can help the company better understand audience needs and optimize the film's content and marketing strategies.

This study takes Turning Red as an example to provide some reference for the improvement of marketing methods for Pixar's animated films. It is equally valuable as a reference for other large film production companies. In addition, this study only uses the 5T theory to analyze the marketing strategy of Pixar's animated movies. This has limitations to a certain extent. In subsequent studies, researchers can also use other marketing theories to study them. A comprehensive comparative analysis of multiple Pixar films in recent years is also necessary.

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