

Exploring the Successful Factors of Brand Collaborations Between KFC and Genshin Impact: A Case Study Analysis

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Abstract: In a post-pandemic era marked by a decline in consumer purchasing power, particularly in the restaurant industry, this paper delves into the successful collaboration between the international fast-food chain KFC and the popular open-world role-playing game, Genshin Impact. This collaboration, which occurred in 2021, generated extensive buzz and recognition on social media platforms. By analyzing this case, we explore the effective marketing strategies and communication methods that led to the success of this co-branding venture. The study uncovers the significance of cross-domain collaborations, emphasizes the impact of consumer groups, and delves into the role of social media and the fan effect in marketing strategies. It also sheds light on the social comparison effect, pivotal in influencing players' motivations and purchasing behavior. Furthermore, it examines KFC's hunger marketing approach and the integration of fast-food industry characteristics. The paper concludes with suggestions for addressing supply chain management, resource optimization, and service quality in co-branding campaigns. Despite these valuable insights, the study acknowledges certain limitations and points towards future research directions.

Keywords: KFC, Genshin Impact, IP, co-branding, advertisement

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In the post-pandemic era, consumer purchasing power has decreased, especially in the restaurant industry. Sectors such as chain fast food and tea beverages, facing challenges due to market saturation and intense competition, are notably affected. Simultaneously, China's gaming market, one of the world's largest, has entered a highly competitive and stable phase. Dominated by top gaming companies, it has become challenging for new games to attract fresh players. Consequently, gaming Intellectual Property (IP) faces the challenges of declining recognition and stagnant player growth. Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore how collaborative partnerships can enhance the competitiveness and appeal of gaming IPs.

KFC, as an international fast-food chain, enjoys widespread global recognition. On the other hand, Genshin Impact is a popular open-world role-playing game developed by Chinese gaming company miHoYo, released in 2020 and quickly achieved worldwide success. In a highly anticipated co-branding venture from March 8th to March 21st in 2021, these two giants from different industries initiated a collaboration that sparked extensive social media discussions and achieved remarkable crossover effects. Building upon this, the present study aims to investigate effective marketing strategies and communication methods by examining this successful co-branding case.

1.2. Literature Review

The phenomenon of co-branding has become a hot topic of interest across various sectors of society, garnering research value in disciplines such as communication, economics, and marketing. It has attracted numerous scholars to engage in research.

1.2.1. The Overview of Co-branding

Before proceeding with further analysis, it is essential to establish a formal definition of "collaborative brand partnerships," exploring what it entails. Scholars in this field have made various attempts to define it. A group of scholars provided a definition, stating that "Collaborative commerce concerns information and idea exchanges between the supply chain members, allowing them to design, develop, and manage products and services collaboratively." [1] This definition clearly outlines the fundamental functionality of collaborative brand partnerships and aligns with the prevailing practices in brand collaborations during the time of the study. Subsequent scholars have further developed this concept. Scholar Xu expanded the definition of collaborative brand partnerships from two dimensions: the research domain dimension of C-Commerce (collaborative innovation, promotion, and operations) and the supply chain (SC) structure dimension of C-Commerce (all supply chain members, i.e., the "organizations"). They define collaborative commerce (C-Commerce) as an operational strategy that enables members from various supply chain structures to exchange information and collaborate, typically employing information technologies, to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of supply chain operations for physical or service products. This includes product innovation, promotion, and operations. [2] In recent research, Scholar Cao succinctly characterizes collaborative brand partnerships as "brand collaborative marketing," where brands collaborate with others to design and produce new products or a series of products, ultimately launching and promoting them jointly or individually.[3] This definition closely aligns with the focal point of this study.

1.2.2. Consumer Groups

Players will buy the uniqueness, rarity, and innovation of KFC co-branded products. But it also depends on the cost performance of the KFC package and the contents in the package. For example, the same IP is the co-name of the Genshin Impact, but Watsons and KFC have completely different sales volumes, which is caused by the different audience groups. The clay film launched by Watsons limits the users who buy such products to a certain extent. As an open-world mobile game, the proportion of male players is significantly larger than that of female players, which means that only a small number of players will have the willingness and opportunity to use the products they buy. But KFC, as a catering industry, can achieve the direction of men and women, young and old. If the player buys the package inside the accessories for him are not practical, or beautiful, then the player's desire to buy will be greatly reduced. [4] The player will then compare the event with other co-branded events, which means that he will largely give up buying the product. If a product can make consumers shine, or have cost performance, the hot sales is inevitable, and will continue to soar with the help of

IP. Therefore, the joint effect of the Genshin Impact and KFC is particularly outstanding, because of the uniqueness of the fast food industry and the limitations of the game audience.

1.2.3. Communication of Social Media

After the joint public, the Genshin Impact company will deliver all kinds of advertising in TikTok, for example, which has a large number of users of social network platform, not limited to the Genshin Impact official account of propaganda and preheating, have a certain fan base of the Genshin Impact blogger released video propaganda, and other kinds of person who are using internet release activities through figure, etc. When the player sees the video posted after opening the social platform, he will be the first to know the specific rules and content of the event. This not only gives the activity heat, so that more people can pay attention to it, but also pushes the content about the Genshin Impact and KFC to some corresponding people who may be interested in it, so that they are also curious about such activities, so as to stimulate their exploration and discovery. At the same time, unofficial publicity will make the ordinary people feel marketing, but to regard such content as the feeling and experience of ordinary people, which is more real and credible, so that the ordinary people also have the desire to buy, not to mention the Genshin Impact players who are themselves targeted for publicity.[5]

2. Research Methodology

In analyzing the dissemination effects of marketing campaigns that combine the fast-food industry with gaming IPs, this study employs the following key research methods: literature analysis and case study.

2.1. Literature Analysis

This study collects both domestic and international literature related to classic marketing cases, the chain restaurant industry, gaming operation cases, co-marketing theories, consumer purchase decisions, price management of food items, and brand image. Qualitative analysis is applied to review and summarize existing theories and research. The goal is to extract relevant theories, models, and methods from the existing literature regarding marketing campaigns that combine the fast-food industry with gaming IPs. This process establishes a theoretical foundation for this study.

2.2. Case Study

This study focuses on the partnership between KFC, a dominant chain fast-food brand in the Chinese market, and Genshin Impact, a globally popular open-world game IP. The investigation centers on their "IP cross-border collaboration" campaigns. It examines the multi-channel distribution, innovations, successful marketing strategies, resulting effects, and the influences present within the campaigns. Furthermore, the study analyzes both the exposed and potential issues and proposes corresponding enhancement strategies. The ultimate aim is to leverage strengths and mitigate weaknesses in future brand alliance activities.

3. Findings

3.1. The Efforts of Genshin Impact

3.1.1. Innovation and Development

When co-branded with other products, IP often uses a new image to stimulate their desire to buy. This

image change is usually very rare, so players will value the occurrence of such activities. When your favorite character can appear in front of him in a new image, it will gain satisfaction and increase the freshness. At the same time, not only the game IP aspect, but also the joint catering industry will also appear to the public with a new image, so that many onlookers will change the image of its company. Perhaps in the past, most customers thought the industry is rigid, but through this event will reverse the positioning of the whole company, which adds a hot topic.

3.1.2. Targeted Users

Not only on social platforms, the game officials will also make announcements in the game to inform and remind all their known audience, and usually appear in the game email or interface. When the Genshin Impact player opens their game account, relevant content pop up. In addition, because the game official knows that the player is the audience, he will specially mark the "rare" items and limited co-branded products contained in the package, so that players can feel a sense of crisis and curiosity. But usually, these contents do not explain the rules of the activity too much, so players will naturally go to other social platforms such as Microblog or WeChat public account to further understand.

3.1.3. Fan Effect

The phenomenon of the fan effect plays a crucial role in the domains of brand collaboration and marketing strategies. The case of Genshin Impact vividly illustrates the complexity of this phenomenon and its impact on co-branding collaborations.

The fan effect, quite literally, is the enthusiasm and loyalty exhibited by a group of devoted supporters towards a brand or product. This enthusiastic engagement often translates into active purchases, advocacy, and community interaction.

Genshin Impact is a game that has been a subject of controversy, with both ardent fans and fervent critics. However, the existence of this controversy paradoxically enhances player engagement and a sense of belonging to the game's community. The fan effect plays a pivotal role in fostering interactions and social activities among players, regardless of their stance on the game.

This fan effect also extends to co-branding collaborations. Devoted players of Genshin Impact exhibit a keen interest in co-branded products associated with the game, owing to their strong connection with the beloved game. They willingly purchase co-branded products, further reinforcing their loyalty to the brands involved. This brand loyalty, in turn, motivates them to actively participate in co-branding collaboration events and become advocates for these partnerships.

In summary, Genshin Impact effectively harnesses the fan effect, highlighting the crucial role of devoted fan communities in brand marketing and co-branding efforts. This phenomenon provides valuable insights for future co-branding collaborations, emphasizing the opportunities and intricacies involved in utilizing the fan effect as a marketing strategy. The interactions between devoted supporters and critics within the Genshin Impact community showcase the nuanced nature of the fan effect, making co-branding collaborations a challenging yet rewarding endeavor.

3.1.4. Social Comparison Effect

The social comparison effect, often referred to as social comparison, is a psychological theory that describes how individuals assess themselves through comparisons with others. This theory can explain how players in the current co-branding event compare themselves to others and the resulting emotions and behaviors.

In this context, the social comparison effect can be categorized into upward and downward social comparison. Upward social comparison occurs when individuals perceive themselves as being in a favorable position in comparison and tend to feel proud and positive. Conversely, downward social

comparison refers to when individuals perceive themselves as being in an unfavorable position and may experience jealousy and anxiety.

In the case of the Genshin Impact co-branding event, players who purchase the co-branded package gain access to unique wing equipment, which holds prestige within the game. Consequently, those who successfully participate in the event may undergo upward social comparison, feeling confident and content. However, other players may experience downward social comparison as they find themselves at a disadvantage compared to those who obtained the wing equipment.

This social comparison effect can play a crucial role in explaining players' motivations and purchasing behavior during the co-branding event. On one hand, it can motivate some players to actively engage in the event, thereby boosting sales. On the other hand, it may prompt other players to take more proactive actions to reduce the gap with their competitors, ultimately driving the success of the brand collaboration.

Therefore, the social comparison effect offers a valuable perspective for understanding the psychology and behavior of Genshin Impact players in co-branding events and provides strategic recommendations for brands and partners on how to address this phenomenon.

3.2. The Efforts of KFC

3.2.1. Hunger Marketing

"Hunger marketing" is an economic and marketing theory that relies on the scarcity of goods or services to stimulate demand. In the offline stores of this collaborative brand partnership, a newly designed image tailored for the event was limitedly printed on the packaging of the special edition meal sets. A limited number of these collaborative family bucket paper buckets were even resold on second-hand online platforms for 35 Chinese yuan. On one hand, this satisfied the collecting instincts of some gamers, and on the other hand, those adept at DIY could repurpose them as display-worthy collectibles and showcase them on social media platforms. Additionally, the collaborative meal sets offered the in-game item "Wings of Gourmet," a type of equipment that is challenging to obtain within the game. The collaborating parties positioned this item as in limited supply, incentivizing players to make purchases. Furthermore, an interesting Easter egg was the trigger for the "group photo" event with the catchphrase "异世相遇，尽享美味" (Meeting in a different world, savoring the delicacy), which was enabled by a limited quantity of character badges—only 90 pairs available per theme store daily. Consumers had to purchase the designated meal set and utter the passphrase to store staff to receive this badge. The restricted supply of collaborative packaging, products, and freebies was perceived as exceedingly scarce by the extensive Genshin Impact player base, creating a sense of urgency. To obtain these products, Genshin Impact players, as well as speculative resellers, often expended a significant amount of money or attention. Moreover, this event was exclusively available in mainland China during the initial launch and only expanded overseas a year later. Overseas players eager to acquire the collaborative merchandise ahead of time needed to invest a greater effort. These strategies are aligned with the scarcity effect within hunger marketing, where individuals are more inclined to pursue goods that feel scarce or challenging to obtain.

3.2.2. Communication and Attitude of Players

The brand stores corresponding to the co-branded products provide an offline place for consumers, which is not only a favorable interactive platform for the second peers, but also to identify more people with the same interests and hobbies, but also to give those who have not paid attention to such topics an opportunity to know and understand. In addition, in offline activities, there are usually many recognizable items, such as standing cards or group photo cards, which gives those consumers a good

sense of experience and comfort. At the same time, there will also be many people dressed up as their favorite characters to come to the scene to clock in and interact. When such content is posted on social platforms, it will bring a wave of heat to the topic. Many people will go with the flow to express their experience, and others will choose to go to offline activities because they know their experience or "follow the trend".

3.2.3. Alignment with Fast-Food Industry

The fast-food characteristics of KFC outlets align closely with the demands of collaborative branding initiatives. The fast-food industry is renowned for its swift service and efficient supply chain, traits that synergize effectively with the nature of collaborative ventures. Collaborative branding endeavors typically generate substantial foot traffic, with each customer harboring a sense of urgency to acquire the target products. Inside KFC outlets, quick order placement and food preparation cater to the immediate gratification expectations of on-site patrons. Meanwhile, the well-established supply chain outside the outlets ensures the efficient distribution of collaborative products to the stores, contributing significantly to the success of collaborative branding campaigns. Furthermore, KFC, as a dominant player in the fast-food industry within the Chinese market, often strategically situates its outlets in prime commercial districts, boasting ample space and visibility. This strategic positioning equips KFC with the capacity to accommodate the fervor generated by such collaborative initiatives.

3.2.4. Scene-based Marketing

Because of the particularity of offline stores, it is not like the network platform across the screen, even if you understand it will not make immediate decisions. But when a passer-by accidentally passes a crowded crowd of active customers, he goes to watch out of curiosity. Because that's the way he can get the answer right away, rather than going to social media platforms for other evidence and reference. When completely different decorations and signs appear on the store, customers may get some effective information because of a curiosity and search for the content related to the IP. When he becomes interested in this topic, this is the first step to the success of offline scenario-based marketing.

3.3. Other Successful Factors

3.3.1. Effective Promotion on Social Media

This collaborative branding campaign incorporates a "social death" trigger mechanism, where participants are required to vocally proclaim the phrase "异世相遇，尽享美味" ("Meeting in a Parallel World, Savoring Delicacies Together") within the physical store to obtain collaborative merchandise. Many gamers attended the event wearing cosplay costumes, rendering the entire event highly visual and engaging. Participants, as well as onlookers, often captured these "social death" moments using their smartphones and shared them on video-sharing platforms, particularly on short-video platforms like Douyin (TikTok) and Kuaishou. These videos gained extensive circulation due to their compelling nature. Diverging from conventional silent collaborative branding approaches, the KFC and Genshin Impact collaboration adopted a vibrant and visually appealing strategy, which facilitated greater attention on social media platforms. This approach aligns with the principles of social media dissemination theory, emphasizing the significance of social media platforms in information propagation and interaction. The campaign meticulously planned visual and attention-grabbing events, motivating participants and spectators to generate copious user-generated content, fostering word-of-mouth marketing, and thereby achieving an impressive outreach on social media platforms.

3.3.2. Synergistic Collaboration: "1+1>2"

KFC, one of the world's largest fast-food chains, and Genshin Impact, a recently prominent and controversial global video game, both possess significant brand recognition and influence. Their collaboration, a case of "1+1>2," aligns with market theory, which suggests that combining two market leaders from different domains can result in a synergistic effect, cumulatively increasing market share. As partners, these two brands complement each other: KFC brings physical monetization and offline visibility to the virtual gaming world, while Genshin Impact injects fresh trends and new customer flows into standardized fast-food offerings. Furthermore, they share overlapping consumer profiles—primarily young, experiential-focused individuals who emphasize service quality. This collaborative campaign attracted loyal fans of both brands, who not only became consumers but also actively promoted the collaboration through positive word-of-mouth, attracting a broader audience. Additionally, KFC's robust capacity for customer flow management effectively accommodated the vast Genshin Impact player base, and the game's player loyalty and spending habits boosted the sales of collaborative fast-food items. The partnership skillfully harnessed factors like market dynamics, partner selection, and brand collaboration effects, demonstrating that the impact of this collaboration exceeded the sum of the two individual brands. This study provides valuable insights for future research on brand collaborations.

3.3.3. Good Utilization of Social Attributes

This study also highlights a crucial aspect of the collaboration: its strong social dimension, which provides significant emotional value to the audience. Beyond the relatively affordable collaborative offerings, the campaign delivers additional emotional value that aligns with consumer demands. This attribute reflects principles from social psychology, particularly the concept of social influence. Social influence theory posits that individuals are often influenced by the behaviors and emotions of others in social contexts. In the context of this collaboration, participants are required to loudly chant a slogan in KFC stores, creating social pressure that encourages more people to join in. Furthermore, the sharing of videos on social media platforms illustrates the concept of social proof in social psychology, where individuals tend to mimic and engage in behaviors they observe in others. Additionally, KFC stores provide spacious "third spaces" for customers, with themed decorations that cater to the interests of the anime and gaming community. These spaces serve as venues for social interactions, photo opportunities, exchanges, and sharing. The collaboration becomes a catalyst for social gatherings among like-minded enthusiasts, fulfilling the requirements of emotional marketing, which underscores the importance of emotional experiences in consumer purchasing decisions. The joy and sense of belonging that consumers experience during the campaign can transcend the material value of the collaborative meal itself. Leveraging this emotional added value associated with its social dimension can enhance consumer loyalty to the brand, motivating them to actively participate in the campaign and promote the brand further.

4. Co-branded problems

4.1. Supply chain management

Usually this kind of game IP and catering company co-branded, often will be revealed and revealed in advance. This is closely related to the wide range of activities and the high heat. At the same time, because there are too many places involved, there will be more personnel involved, but the more internal personnel, the worse it is to manage. When this happens, it makes the player lose their expectation and freshness when they get the official notice.

At the same time, the supply of products is also a big factor. Usually companies don't go out to

know the amount, so they sell it in limited time and limited ways rather than book. Although this reduces the workload of brands, it brings great inconvenience to consumers. When the consumer is excited to be told that he does not have the goods that they need, he will inevitably feel disappointed, because the customer wastes his time and energy, even money, but did not get any benign results. The limited way makes the price of co-branded products on the second-hand platform. Players will chase after these rare items because it gives them satisfaction and vanity. But in fact, this has caused a great disruption to the market.

4.2. Resource optimization

Co-branded products, especially those between IP and catering companies, usually only offer one or no more than three different packages for consumers to choose from. Take the "joint name of the Genshin Impact and KFC" as an example, KFC only provides a double bucket package for players to buy, which means that no matter whether the player has the ability or willingness to buy, there is only one choice. However, the company also adjusted the fact of only one exchange code for a double meal. Although it was "forced" to increase the purchase willingness of consumers to some extent, consumers could not reasonably solve the food contained in the package. This not only wastes public resources and food, but also increases the workload of the staff.

4.3. Reduction of service quality

Because the joint activities lead to a sharp increase in passenger flow, even dozens of times or even a hundred times more than in the past, of course, this is also the result that the company and the joint party want to get. However, the significant increase in the number of customers also means that the shop staff in the store cannot pay attention to every consumer, which greatly reduces the service quality in the store. At the same time, the increase of customers means the increase of order volume. Although many co-branded parties will choose the type of fast food industry to achieve a "win-win" effect, even so, the quality of the product cannot be guaranteed, and even the same morning and afternoon restaurants have a completely different taste. In addition, the waiting time of customers will become longer, and the main advantage of services such as the fast food industry is that the fast preparation time and the relatively unified taste are guaranteed, but now it has completely lost the original intention of "fast food". Even ordinary customers who want to order because they save time and energy will have to give up because the waiting time is too long.

5. Recommendations

First, differentiate the joint products. To ensure both consumer experience and the effectiveness of the event, different types of joint products can be prepared based on the anticipated number of participants. Specific measures include conducting targeted in-game surveys during the pre-launch phase to estimate the number of players participating in the package purchase. Prepare an adequate quantity of low-cost paper packaging based on survey results to meet the needs of the majority of players and other offline consumers, which can serve as a promotional tool. Distribute virtual item redemption codes equivalent to the survey participants to enhance the event's effectiveness. Limit the availability of physical joint gifts, such as badges, to maintain their scarcity and achieve the effect of hunger marketing.

Second, ensure the quality of store services. To ensure that the joint event does not affect the quality of store services, the following measures should be taken: allocate sufficient staff to handle potential peaks in customer traffic. Ensure store cleanliness and orderliness to provide a good consumer experience and a professional brand image. Expedite service delivery to meet consumer needs and ensure their satisfaction while in the store. By maintaining store order and providing high-quality

service, effective conversion among loyal fans can be achieved. It's important to note that the increased popularity of the joint event will inevitably result in a doubled workload, and the degree of fatigue will affect the quality of work for employees. Therefore, considerations should be given to the rest and recognition of the staff to alleviate their fatigue and ensure service quality.

Third, in order to minimize food waste resulting from bundled sales while ensuring the effectiveness of the co-branding campaign and enhancing player experiences, we suggest the following academic measures for the authorities: optimize and readjust the products and specifications within the co-branded meal packages. The objective of this measure is to prevent players from purchasing excess food, thereby utilizing food resources more reasonably. This not only safeguards consumer rights but also enhances their satisfaction and overall experience.

6. Limitations& Future Directions

Despite the in-depth exploration of the KFC and Genshin Impact co-branding campaign in this study, there are still some limitations. Firstly, we faced challenges in acquiring specific operational data from official sources, which has somewhat constrained the accuracy of our analysis. Future research could consider establishing more data collaboration or access channels to obtain more comprehensive information. Secondly, this study focused solely on one co-branding campaign between KFC and Genshin Impact, which represents a relatively narrow research scope. Subsequent studies could expand this scope to investigate co-branding collaborations between a wider range of brands to deepen our understanding of co-branding marketing. Furthermore, this research primarily employed case analysis and literature review methods, which may not uncover all potential causal relationships. Future research could incorporate additional methods such as field research and experimental design to conduct a more thorough analysis of the impact of co-branding campaigns. Lastly, this study was limited to the Chinese market, potentially limiting the applicability of our findings on an international scale. Future research could broaden the geographical scope to examine the co-branding marketing effects in different regions and cultural contexts.

Looking ahead, future research endeavors could delve into a more profound exploration of the causal relationships between co-branding campaigns and their effects on brands and consumers, thus elucidating the mechanisms through which co-branding activities impact various stakeholders. Interdisciplinary research could provide fresh perspectives and methodologies to comprehensively understand the multifaceted effects of co-branding marketing. Strengthening on-site investigations of consumers and businesses could provide deeper insights into their needs and feedback, offering more tailored recommendations for the planning and implementation of co-branding campaigns. Additionally, research attention could be directed towards issues of resource waste and social responsibility within co-branding campaigns, with the aim of proposing sustainable solutions that benefit all stakeholders in the long run. In-depth investigations in these areas will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of brand co-branding activities and optimize their effectiveness.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, our research has shed light on the dynamics of co-branding campaigns, with a particular focus on the KFC and Genshin Impact collaboration. We've highlighted key findings, including the significant influence of social attributes and emotional value in such campaigns. Additionally, we've proposed practical measures to address issues related to supply chain management and food waste in bundled sales.

This study offers valuable insights into the world of co-branding marketing, emphasizing the need for differentiation in joint products, maintaining service quality, and optimizing product specifications.

While these findings were drawn from a single case, they pave the way for future research into co-branding collaborations between a wider range of brands and across different cultural contexts.

Looking ahead, interdisciplinary research and deeper consumer and business investigations promise a more comprehensive understanding of co-branding's impact. Our research highlights the complex yet promising nature of co-branding marketing, emphasizing its potential to create a win-win scenario for both brands and consumers.

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