

Digital Marketing Strategy of Cross-border E-commerce Enterprises: A Case Study of SHEIN

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of global trade digital transformation, digital marketing has become the core tool for corporate competition. This article takes SHEIN, a benchmark fast fashion cross-border e-commerce enterprise, as the research object, focusing on its core digital marketing strategies, the logic of integration system construction, the synergistic impact on brand building and user conversion, and the inspiration for similar companies. Through literature research method, case study method, data analysis method and comparison analysis method, the research found that SHEIN uses social media as the traffic core, data driver as the engine, and App as the base to integrate Search Engine Optimization (SEO), User Created Content (UGC), localization and other strategies to form a collaborative system. Its success is due to the ultimate cost-effectiveness, flexible supply chain and global execution capabilities, but it also faces risks such as brand trust and compliance. The research provides theoretical supplements and practical references for its digital marketing.

Keywords: Cross-border e-commerce; marketing strategy; SHEIN; digital marketing; social media marketing.

1. Introduction

The digital transformation of global trade is accelerating. As the core carrier of digital trade infrastructure, cross-border e-commerce is becoming a key implementation path for the 'Belt and Road' digital strategy by reconstructing the global supply chain and consumption link [1]. In 2025, global cross-border e-commerce development is expected to hit another new high, with the global market size reaching US\$4.2 trillion. It encompasses the buying and selling of goods and services across national

boundaries through online channels [2]. The business of cross-border e-commerce is towards branding, channel diversification, socialization and youth. The development of new models, the independent station of e-commerce is also growing in the direction of e-commerce brands [3].

However, the business model of cross-border e-commerce also faces a series of challenges in the market environment, such as cultural differences, logistics issues, payment methods, etc. At the same time, with the continuous updates and iterations of digital technologies, such as social media, big data applications

and AI technologies, it has had a profound impact on the traditional e-commerce marketing model.

As the leader of cross-border e-commerce, SHEIN has taken advantage of the epidemic era and the development of the digital economy and has fierce development momentum. The current market valuation has exceeded US\$66 billion. This study will use SHEIN as a case to enrich the cross-border e-commerce marketing theory while providing reference for the marketing paths of other companies in the industry.

This study will focus on the following core questions. First, the core digital marketing strategy adopted by SHEIN, the method for enterprises to build an integrated marketing system; Second, SHEIN's marketing strategy works synergistically in brand building, user acquisition and transformation and retention; Thirdly, the successful experience of this enterprise can be used for reference and enlightenment for cross-border e-commerce enterprises in the same industry.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Literature Review

Cross-border e-commerce refers to the e-commerce model that completes cross-border transactions through a third party or self-built platform, playing the role of an intermediary and connecting all parties to the transaction. Digital marketing is based on digital technology, interacting with users through Search Engine Marketing (SEM/SEO), social media marketing, content marketing, influencer marketing, etc., to achieve product value. In recent years, scholars at home and abroad have carried out multi-dimensional research on cross-border e-commerce marketing: Some scholars verified the effect of AI product selection on improving conversion rates; other scholars revealed the positive correlation between SMEs' social media investment and overseas revenue [1,2]. Some scholars proposed the "supply chain-brand" two-wheel model, but ignored the catalytic role of digital marketing; some scholars emphasize the cost reduction of flexible supply chains, but does not associate the closed loop of marketing data; other scholars point out that Gen Z's price sensitivity drives repurchase but ignores the contribution of the UGC community to trust-building [3-5]. This study fills the gap in the timeliness of existing research and systematically dismantles SHEIN's digital marketing collaboration network.

3. SHEIN and Its Cross-border E-commerce Marketing Environment Analysis

SHEIN is a cross-border B2C fast fashion e-commerce platform founded in Nanjing in 2008, with women's cloth-

ing as the core, covering more than 150 countries such as North America and Europe, supporting more than 50 languages and having 11 private brands. Its core advantage lies in the digital on-demand flexible supply chain: the first small batch production is quickly returned to keep up with the fashion trend; Big data is deeply integrated into user behavior analysis, product optimization and other links, accurately driving operational decisions such as pricing and advertising, transforming it from a clothing platform to a technology-oriented fashion technology company. In terms of global layout, SHEIN adopts the strategy of "global sales + localized operation", adapts to multiple Chinese languages, payment, logistics and customer service systems, and builds an innovative business system that adapts to the digital era with "speed, efficiency and sensitivity" as the core driving force through local social celebrities. At present, cross-border e-commerce has become an emerging growth pole driven by global restructuring, technological revolution and regional agreements such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), AI and big data improve industry efficiency, consumer demand differentiation makes ESG the key to brand premium, and China's policy support and international rules promote the development of corporate compliance. However, the industry competition is fierce, the head platform relies on technology to establish efficiency barriers, suppliers bargain weakly, logistics providers master key resources, consumers suppress prices, and the industry turns to focus on the comprehensive value of the brand. As a benchmark for digital marketing, SHEIN is seizing technology and market opportunities, AI improves personality recommendation efficiency and repurchase rate, platforms such as TikTok reach 300 million Generation Z, Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) model forms a closed loop of private domain traffic, low penetration rate of social e-commerce in emerging markets brings growth space, and local payment increases conversion rate. However, the challenges are equally severe, with surging global data compliance costs, privacy policies restricting ad tracking, rising social media advertising costs, and cultural differences increasing marketing costs and time, requiring a continuous balance between innovation and risk [6].

4. In-Depth Analysis of SHEIN's Digital Marketing Strategy System

4.1 Traffic acquisition and User Interaction: Multi-Channel Linkage to Build a Traffic Pools

With social media as the core, SHEIN achieves precise reach through hierarchical operations: cooperating with leading Internet celebrities to create topics, mid-waist Key Opinion Consumer (KOC) penetrating vertical fields, affiliate marketing to attract amateurs to promote, and

launching interactive challenges on a regular basis (such as #SHEINHaul with more than 60 billion views), incentivizing user participation with commissions and lottery draws, and strengthening brand stickiness. At the same time, it adheres to the “mobile first” strategy, builds the App as the core position, controls the loading time within 2 seconds through technical optimization, supports multilingual and simplifies the settlement process, and combines exclusive benefits (such as first order discounts, sign-in points) and accurate push (such as sending recall coupons to lost users), so that the App contributes more than 80% of the transaction share. In addition, through the combination of “SEO + paid advertising”, traffic is drained: SEO optimizes long-tail keywords and publishes dressing guides to form a closed loop, and organic search traffic accounts for more than 80%; Paid advertising focuses on SEM, display advertising, and remarketing to quickly respond to short-term demand. The localization strategy further adapts to the regional market, supports 20+ languages and local payments, customizes marketing materials (such as the Middle East Ramadan special session), and shortens the delivery time through local warehousing, reducing the delivery cycle of Saudi users from 9.2 days to 3.4 days, increasing the repurchase rate [7].

4.2 Precision Marketing and User Experience: Data-Driven Closed-Loop Optimization

SHEIN builds a full-link system with data as the core: cross-platform tracking of user behavior (browsing, add-on, etc.) to form a refined portrait, and a personalized recommendation system responds to needs within 0.8 seconds, such as the app immediately pushes similar models after users browse long skirts, increasing the conversion rate by nearly 30%. Dynamic pricing adjusts prices based on demand forecasting models and optimizes discount forms (such as “full discount” vs. “flash sale” comparison) in combination with A/B testing to tilt resources towards high-conversion solutions. User experience optimization runs through the whole process: the app achieves 100% mobile adaptation through Content Delivery Network (CDN) acceleration and intelligent compression technology, simplifying the settlement process (such as one-click payment); UGC and word-of-mouth fission reduce customer acquisition costs - users can earn commissions for publishing content with the hashtag #SHEIN, with an average of 50,000 new UGC added per day, which brands aggregate to product detail pages to enhance trust, and at the same time activate the user network through the “old with new” fission mechanism, and the proportion of organic traffic has been maintained at more than 85% for a long time [8]. Search engine optimization and content marketing complement each other: official website blog publishing trend analysis, user comments enrich the content ecology, remarketing advertising awakens dormant

demand and builds a closed loop of “search-content-conversion”.

4.3 Strategic Synergy and Global Expansion: Closed-Loop System Supports Efficient Growth

SHEIN’s digital marketing strategy forms a highly collaborative closed loop: social media traffic is precipitated as user assets through the App, and App behavior data feeds back personalized recommendations and pricing; SEO and paid advertising drive traffic to social media and apps, while UGC content improves SEO effectiveness and serves as product material. Localization strategies ensure that each market adapts to regional needs, and data-driven capabilities provide a basis for decision-making for localization. For example, social media UGC is used by recommendation engines for personalized display, and at the same time, it is crawled by search engines to improve rankings, ultimately driving in-app conversions, and user purchase behavior generates new UGC to feed back to social media [9]. This cycle of “traffic acquisition, user precipitation, data analysis, experience optimization, and word-of-mouth fission” makes the strategy produce a 1+1>2 effect: global brands implement localized operations, data-driven optimization of the efficiency of each link, mobile first and social fission to reduce customer acquisition costs, and ultimately support SHEIN to achieve efficient global expansion in the field of fast fashion, reaching an average of 300 million Generation Z per day, becoming a benchmark for innovative business systems in the digital age.

5. Effectiveness Evaluation and Challenges of SHEIN’s Digital Marketing Strategies

SHEIN’s digital marketing strategy has achieved remarkable results, with wide brand awareness and influence, huge global downloads, covering many countries and regions, and its participation on social platforms ranks among the top fashion brands, and its brand recognition far exceeds that of some traditional fast fashion brands. The scale of users continued to expand, and the number of active users increased significantly. The annual revenue performance is eye-catching, and the repurchase rate is much higher than the industry average; The proportion of long-term active users has increased, and the membership system has enhanced user stickiness. Its success factors include the ultimate cost performance and massive product selection, powerful data-driven precision marketing (high explosion rate), efficient operation of social media and influencer marketing, mobile App experience optimization (fast loading speed, high proportion of mobile transactions), rapid response to niche needs, efficient supply chain management (low inventory rate), and strong global

localization execution capabilities. However, SHEIN also faces many challenges: its brand image is plagued by environmental controversies and quality issues, intensified competition and imitators diverting users, rising user acquisition costs, intensifying data privacy and compliance risks, over-reliance on promotions weakens brand premium capabilities, cultural conflicts affecting the localization effect of some markets, and environmental pressure also forces it to reform its production model [10].

6. Implications and Recommendations for Cross-border E-commerce Enterprises

Cross-border e-commerce enterprises can learn from experience and promote their own development from the strategic and operational levels. In terms of strategy, build a data-centered marketing system to achieve accurate insight and positioning; build a social media ecosystem and use hierarchical influencer marketing to form a virtuous circle with UGC fission; Balance globalization and localization and develop an adaptation strategy. operationally, create a high-quality mobile app experience and improve user retention and conversion; establish a flexible supply chain to achieve quick reaction of small orders and reduce inventory risks; Strengthen user lifecycle management and increase loyalty. For SHEIN itself, it is necessary to enhance its brand image and sustainability, increase investment in environmental protection, and launch high-end auxiliary lines. Optimize the data compliance system to avoid penalties for violations; reduce promotion dependence and enhance brand premium; Deepen localized operations, form local teams, strengthen cooperation with local KOLs and brands, and avoid cultural conflicts.

7. Conclusion

The research conclusions show that SHEIN takes social media as the core to obtain traffic, data-driven precision marketing, optimizes user experience with apps, and combines multiple strategies to form a synergistic effect, and its success comes from cost-effectiveness, data capabilities, supply chain and other factors. This model provides a reference for cross-border e-commerce, but it also faces risks such as brand trust, competition, and compliance. The research has limitations, the data mostly comes from public channels, lacks internal first-hand information, and does not subdivide and compare the effects of different market strategies. Future research can deeply explore the synergy mechanism between SHEIN's supply chain and digital marketing and analyze how it accurately supports

marketing decision-making. For different regional markets, compare the differences and effects of digital marketing strategies, and summarize the laws of localization. study how to adjust strategies for cross-border e-commerce to achieve long-term development under the pressure of data compliance and sustainable development; Explore the application prospects of emerging technologies such as AI virtual fitting and metaverse marketing in cross-border e-commerce digital marketing and their impact on companies such as SHEIN.

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