

Research on Optimization of F1 Event Marketing Strategies in China Based on Comparative Analysis

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Abstract:

This study adopts the 4P marketing theory as the analytical framework, aiming to explore the current situation and optimization methods of F1 in the Chinese market. Research has found that the Chinese Grand Prix has reached an international first-class level in hardware such as track facilities and operational professionalism, but there are still shortcomings in event culture, ticket structure design, venue expansion, and cross disciplinary marketing: most of the event products focus on sports events themselves, lacking cultural symbols and urban characteristics; The ticketing system is complex and the value of additional services is limited; The audience mainly comes from China and has not fully utilized the role of the event in promoting tourism and consumption; A single promotion method lacks cross-border cooperation and is difficult to sustainably expand its influence. To this end, this study proposes optimization strategies from the following four aspects: strengthening the cultural connotation of event products, optimizing ticketing structures to enhance differentiated experiences and ticket purchasing efficiency, expanding channel coverage, extending offline activities of event brands to the national level, and combining them with online dissemination to form linkage and promote cross-border broadcasting models. This study enriches the research on cross-cultural marketing and localization practices of sports events at the theoretical level, provides actionable suggestions for the development of F1 in China at the practical level, and provides reference for the promotion of other top international events in emerging markets.

Keywords: F1 racing; Chinese market; marketing strategy; comparative analysis; 4P theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Formula One (F1) is the world's top-level motor sport event organized by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). Since its first race at the Silverstone Circuit in the United Kingdom in 1950, it has been ranked alongside the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup as the three major global sports events. As a highly commercialized and globalized event, the operational system and marketing model of F1 have formed a relatively mature framework, demonstrating a high level of professionalism and systematicness from season planning to single-race operations.

In the Chinese market, since F1 first landed at the Shanghai International Circuit in 2004, it has held a total of 18 races, gradually becoming an important case of China's sports industry integrating with the international community. In the season 2023, F1's total online exposure in China reached 16.4 billion times, with video views approaching 970 million times, and it made the social media trending list many times, showing its communication potential in the digital age. However, compared with successful cases in Europe and Middle East, there are still gaps in aspects like F1's market cultivation and local sponsorship participation for the F1 Chinese market.

1.2 Purpose and Questions

This study aims to explore the current situation and optimization paths of F1's marketing in the Chinese market through a comparative analysis approach. Specifically, it will focus on the marketing strategies of the Chinese Grand Prix as the core object, and select several representative international successful cases for comparison. By comparing the differences in brand building, digital communication, audience operation, and business cooperation among different markets, it will identify the shortcomings and potential opportunities in the Chinese market.

Centering on this idea, this study intends to answer the following three core questions: What are the key issues in F1's marketing strategies during its entry and deep cultivation of the Chinese market, and how do these issues differ from the successful experiences in other countries or regions? What lessons can the Chinese Grand Prix learn from the successful experiences of mature international markets, especially in terms of digital communication, innovation in race experience, and cooperation with local brands? How to design optimization strategies that meet local needs by combining China's unique media ecology and user behavior characteristics, so as to achieve an organic integration of global experience and localized practice? Through answering the above questions, this study

can not only deepen the understanding of cross-cultural marketing of sports events but also put forward operable countermeasures and suggestions for F1's future development in China.

1.3 Significance

This study has value both theoretically and practically. Firstly, at the theoretical level, through cross-market comparative analysis, this paper not only deepens the understanding of the differentiation and adaptability of sports event marketing strategies, but also provides new cases and frameworks for research on cross-cultural communication and localized marketing. At the practical aspect, the results of the study will provide feasible strategic suggestions for the further development of F1 in China, especially in enhancing brand influence, cultivating audience groups, promoting sponsorship cooperation, etc. From a broader perspective, the comparative experience and optimization paths revealed in this study can also serve as a reference for the promotion and implementation of other top international sports events in emerging markets, helping the sports industry seek balance and breakthroughs in the tension between globalization and localization.

2. Basic Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks of Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategy refers to a systematic action plan formulated by enterprises or organizations to achieve market goals, whose core lies in meeting the needs of target markets through the rational allocation of resources. In sports events, marketing strategies are not only related to the communication effect of the event but also determine its commercial value and cultural influence.

This study adopts the classic 4P marketing theory as the analytical framework. The theory was proposed by McCarthy (1960) and includes the following four dimensions:

- **Product:** Refers to the event itself and its derivative content, including driver images, event experience, and related cultural products.
 - **Price:** Covers the pricing mechanisms for event tickets, media broadcasting fees, membership systems, and derivatives.
 - **Place:** Refers to the distribution channels for event communication and services, including online digital platforms and offline scenarios.
 - **Promotion:** Refers to the realization of event communication and value conversion through advertising, public relations, brand cooperation, and social media interaction.
- Analyzing the current status and problems of F1's marketing in the Chinese market using the 4P theory helps to reveal its deficiencies in different dimensions and provides a systematic basis for optimizing strategies.

3. Comparative Analysis

With the help of the 4P marketing theory framework, this study will systematically compare the marketing strategies of the F1 Shanghai Grand Prix with those of mature international cases. By selecting typical circuits such as Monaco, Singapore, Abu Dhabi, and Miami as references, it will sort out their existing advantages and disadvantages.

3.1 Product

The Shanghai International Circuit is one of the first professional circuits in Asia built in accordance with the FIA Formula One standards. It has been widely hailed as a model of world-class circuits since its inauguration in 2004 with its unique design concept and complete hardware facilities. The circuit was designed by the renowned designer Hermann Tilke, and the overall layout of the circuit is inspired by the Chinese character “上” (shàng, meaning “up” or “Shanghai”). This design not only demonstrates the integration of modern engineering and traditional Chinese cultural elements but also endows the circuit with distinct symbolic features. The hardware facilities, supporting spaces, and event environment of the Shanghai International Circuit provide spectators with an intuitive experience. The event itself carries the intense atmosphere and ornamental value of top-level F1 sports competition. In recent years, the organizers have gradually introduced localized operation measures, such as arranging driver meet-and-greets and autograph sessions, and setting up fan interaction areas. These measures have gradually led to more diverse experience content for the event and enhanced the audience’s sense of immersion.

In contrast, the Monaco Grand Prix, which is known as “the jewel in the crown of Formula 1,” stands as a prime example of taking derivative products to the extreme. It is not only a top-tier racing event but also a symbol of the global luxury lifestyle. Since the 1950s, the event has gradually been closely integrated with Monaco’s urban history, elite socializing, and Mediterranean tourism culture, forming a unique narrative and brand imagery [1]. Experiences such as watching the race from yachts, casino entertainment, luxury car displays, and high-end parties have become important components of the event, endowing the Monaco Grand Prix with both sporting and socio-cultural significance.

In comparison, the race products of the Shanghai Grand Prix are still mainly focused on the core aspect of “sports competitions.” Although its physical products have reached world-class standards, there is still a deficiency in the development of derivative products. It lacks in-depth narratives that can represent Chinese culture or Shanghai’s urban symbols, and fails to expand the symbolic significance of the event through the extension of cultural

symbolization, immersive experience design, or the development of peripheral derivatives. This means that there is still room for improvement in the cultural value and brand memorability of the event on a global scale.

3.2 Price

The 2025 F1 Chinese Grand Prix has adopted a distinct tiered pricing strategy in terms of ticketing to cover audiences at different levels. The price of three-day tickets for ordinary grandstands and grass areas is as low as 290 yuan, which is at a people-friendly level. This can effectively lower the threshold for watching the race, expand the participation of the general public, and ensure the rapid accumulation of event exposure and a base of audiences. The price of three-day tickets for the Main Stand Area A is set at 2,880 CNY, and the newly added three-day tickets for Stand B are 1,880 CNY, providing options for audiences who pursue a comfortable viewing environment and additional services. This ticket pricing system, through the coexistence of popular basic tickets and high-end segmented tickets, not only enhances the breadth of ticketing coverage but also creates revenue channels with differentiated value levels, which is conducive to the dual development of the event’s commercial returns and brand building.

The Singapore Grand Prix, as Asia’s first night city street race, is a typical case of the integration of F1 events with urban tourism and festival experiences. A study based on text analysis of user-generated content shows that during the event, audiences not only paid attention to the races themselves but also highly praised supporting activities such as music performances, night view lighting, and local cuisine. This indicates that the organizers successfully created a comprehensive experience scenario of “sports + urban nightlife” [2]. This model has extended the value chain of the event, making F1 an important part of Singapore’s urban brand and national tourism strategy.

Although the Chinese Grand Prix offers a variety of package tickets, including multi-day tickets and VIP combination tickets, the excessive number and complex structure of the package tickets have caused difficulties for audiences in making choices. At the same time, most audiences mainly focus on the event itself when purchasing tickets and have limited interest in additional services. This has restricted the purchase volume of package tickets, making it difficult to give full play to their additional value and also affecting the efficiency of ticketing revenue.

3.3 Place

The Shanghai Grand Prix performs prominently in terms of digital communication channels. The 2025 Chinese Grand Prix achieved 55.6 million interactions on F1’s official social media platforms, and over the past 12 months,

China has led the world with a 39% fan growth rate [3,4]. Additionally, Tencent's renewal of its digital media rights agreement with F1 until 2027 has further solidified the race's communication channels in the Chinese market [5]. These measures have significantly enhanced the race's online exposure and audience engagement, giving the Shanghai Grand Prix a leading role in the digital realm.

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, as the season-ending race, demonstrates stronger international advantages in multi-channel integrated communication. The race not only achieves global coverage through television and F1's official platforms but also forms collaborative communication with tourism promotion channels, positioning the Grand Prix as Abu Dhabi's city card. Relevant surveys show that European tourists accounted for 15% of the total audience during the race, with British tourists increasing by 28%. The multi-faceted dissemination of race-related information on travel websites, accommodation booking platforms, and social media attracted approximately 170,000 international visitors, generating \$179 million in consumption, 85% of which was concentrated in accommodation[6]. This combined online and offline communication approach not only increased the exposure of the race itself but also significantly promoted local tourism and the international communication of the city's brand.

Overall, the communication channels of the Shanghai Grand Prix are still mainly focused on digitalization and the domestic market, lacking the cross-border communication and cultural-tourism integration advantages demonstrated by the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Although Shanghai has well-developed transportation and accommodation facilities, the event has not yet effectively attracted international tourists through multi-channel integration, nor has it fully exerted the role of the race in driving urban tourism and the economy.

3.4 Promotion

Shanghai GP has performed prominently in digital marketing. During the race, related topics frequently appeared on Weibo's hot search list, and race content on short video platforms (such as Douyin and Bilibili) received a large number of views, especially attracting young audiences. The participation of local driver Zhou Guanyu brought huge localized communication advantages to the race. As the first Chinese driver in F1, he actively engages in media interviews, fan interactions, and promotional activities, which have significantly increased the attention and recognition of the event in China and enhanced audience participation and loyalty[7].

As an emerging F1 event in the U.S. market, the Miami Grand Prix fully demonstrates the cross-border integration of the race with entertainment, media and local culture. According to research, the inaugural Miami Grand Prix in 2022 attracted 243,000 on-site spectators, and the num-

ber of online viewers increased by 27% compared to the previous year's Austin GP. The success of the event is inseparable from diversified marketing strategies: Event tickets not only include access to the race but also entry to music festivals and parties featuring well-known artists with international stars such as Post Malone and Zedd in the lineup. The "race & entertainment" bundled ticketing model has significantly improved the cost-effectiveness of tickets, effectively attracting audiences whose main focus aren't on racing, and increasing overall attendance and event participation. In terms of sponsorship and brand cooperation, the Miami Grand Prix has reached a long-term naming rights agreement with Crypto.com until at least 2030 and has attracted cross-industry giants such as J.P. Morgan, Hard Rock, and Red Bull, forming a brand matrix covering finance, entertainment, and consumption. In addition, the event has carried out cross-border cooperation with the NBA, achieving mutual penetration of fan groups through social media interactions and joint activities. Finally, the Netflix documentary "Drive to Survive" has successfully expanded the young and female audience, with 28% of new American F1 fans getting into the sport because of the documentary. During the race weekend, the official F1 app and website achieved 140 million views, a year-on-year increase of 39%, while generating high-profile topic discussions on social media platforms. The participation of local driver Logan Sargent has further enhanced the discussion and emotional resonance of the race on U.S. social networks [8].

Compared with the Miami Grand Prix, the Shanghai race still has certain limitations in terms of promotion. Its activities are mainly focused on the race itself, lacking the integration of cross-border content, and the linkage end of ticket bundling is also lacking in attractiveness, making it difficult to provide audiences with diversified entertainment and consumption experiences. At the same time, the Shanghai race has insufficient in-depth cooperation with local enterprises, entertainment, or sports leagues, and lacks long-term brand linkage and cross-border marketing strategies. This has to a certain extent limited the attractiveness of the race to young groups and potential new audiences, and also affected the sustainable influence and market expansion potential of the race.

4. Suggestions for Marketing Optimization Strategies

The systematic comparison of the Shanghai Grand Prix with other typical international F1 events such as Monaco, Singapore, Abu Dhabi, and Miami reveals that the Shanghai circuit already boasts world-class standards in terms of event hardware and operational foundations. However, there are still gaps in areas such as product narrative, tick-

eting design, channel expansion, and cross-border marketing. These shortcomings not only hinder the enhancement of the event's brand value but also limit its driving effect on urban tourism, consumption, and international communication. To address this, under the framework of the 4P marketing theory, this study combines the reality of the Chinese market with international successful experiences and puts forward the following optimization suggestions,.

4.1 Product

The Shanghai race is still confined to "sports competition" itself, lacking cultural symbols and long-term accumulation of the event brand. To enhance the cultural value of the core products of the event, the Chinese Grand Prix needs to continue making efforts in the driver ecosystem and cultural narrative to create the cultural characteristics of Chinese F1. On the one hand, it can strengthen cooperation with tiered events such as China F4, Asian F3, and F1 Academy, which is the women's Formula, introduce relevant content on F1 broadcasting platforms, gradually cultivate local audiences' understanding and attention to racing culture, and foster a stronger racing culture atmosphere. On the other hand, with Zhou Guanyu as the core figure, create a series of promotional materials, such as short documentaries and exclusive interactive live broadcasts, to shape the image of a "local hero" and enhance the emotional bond and cultural identity of the event.

4.2 Price

Based on the actual ticket purchase situation of the F1 Chinese Grand Prix, the existing ticketing structure should be scientifically and reasonably optimized. Local audiences mainly focus on the race itself when purchasing tickets, while their demand for travel packages and cross-city viewing combinations is relatively limited. Therefore, the event organizers should appropriately reduce the number of travel packages and concentrate resources on optimizing the core viewing experience to improve ticketing sales efficiency and audience satisfaction. In terms of high-end tickets, value-added services and differentiated experiences should be further enhanced. At the same time, considering the large number of spectators at the event venue, more stand areas should be evaluated and appropriately opened to ensure sufficient supply of basic tickets, so as to meet the on-site needs of the general audience and increase the overall viewing capacity and ticketing revenue of the event.

On this basis, research on dynamic pricing in the field of sports marketing is also worthy of reference. A study by Drayer et al. pointed out that dynamic ticket pricing can flexibly adjust prices according to factors such as event time, seat location, and market demand, thereby more effectively balancing supply and demand, increasing rev-

enue, and optimizing the audience's ticket-purchasing experience[9]. This view provides academic support for the ticketing strategy of the F1 Chinese Grand Prix: by introducing a dynamic pricing mechanism, it can not only increase ticketing revenue during peak demand periods but also attract audiences with more attractive prices during low-demand periods, thus taking into account both economic benefits and audience stickiness.

4.3 Place

Currently, the audience group of Formula 1 Grand Prix in China is still mainly concentrated in the coastal areas and other developed districts. To truly promote the popularization of racing culture, it is necessary to break through the spatial limitations of the race track and extend the reach of the event to more cities and groups. For example, fan activities such as "Checkered Flag Carnival" can be expanded to emerging market cities like Beijing, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Xi'an. These regions not only have huge potential for sports consumption and a solid base of young audiences but also possess strong capabilities in undertaking cultural, entertainment, and tourism industries. Through multi-city tours and sub-station activities, the event brand can expand from single-point communication to multi-point linkage, gradually forming a nationwide influence network. In terms of enhancing attractiveness to international tourists, the Shanghai Grand Prix needs to pay more attention to targeted communication in target markets and the implementation and conversion of fan economy. It can carry out differentiated communication targeting regions with a strong racing culture atmosphere such as Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Customized promotion will not only help increase the exposure of the event in target markets but also improve the travel convenience and viewing willingness of the audience.

4.4 Promotion

The promotion of the Shanghai Grand Prix should go beyond mere single-event publicity. It should promote cross-border collaborations and linkages with local brands to create a more diverse and strategic communication model. Collaborations can be established with technology and new energy vehicle brands such as Xiaomi, BYD, and Huawei to launch smart viewing applications, co-branded merchandise, and immersive experiences, thereby enhancing the event's sense of technology and appeal to younger audiences.

At the same time, promoting in-depth participation of local enterprises in team sponsorships, event naming rights, and virtual advertising spaces can not only increase the exposure of Chinese brands in the global F1 landscape but also bring more stable commercial support to the event.

Drawing on the research experience of English football sponsorship programs [10], the Shanghai round should pay more attention to the alignment with the event's values and target audience in sponsorship relationship management, emphasizing long-term cooperation and rights activation rather than one-time, superficial collaborations. Only when the event and the brand form strategic complementarity can the sponsorship value be maximized.

In addition, the Shanghai Grand Prix should strengthen cross-border cooperation with the entertainment and sports industries. For example, it can combine Esports to create a composite communication scenario of "Motor racing + Esports" or link up with the music and film industries to expand the audience's cultural and consumption experiences. Through such a promotional system that balances strategic depth and diversified interactions, the event can attract a broader audience, enhance brand recall and market penetration, expanding its commercial value while further consolidating its position in China's sports industry and the global F1 arena.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

The Formula 1 Chinese Grand Prix has reached international standards in terms of track facilities and event professionalism. However, there is still room for improvement in cultural shaping, ticketing optimization, channel expansion, and cross-border marketing. It faces challenges such as the lack of a local motorsport culture, complex ticketing structures, limited audience coverage, and few local collaborations. To address these issues, it is necessary to comprehensively optimize the marketing system of Formula 1 in China through strategies such as building a local driver ecosystem, strengthening brand partnerships, enhancing the localization of content and activities, and expanding the coverage of offline experience cities.

5.2 Future Study Directions

This study provides a preliminary exploration of the marketing strategies and 4P optimization for the Formula 1 Chinese Grand Prix, but there are still several directions for further in-depth research:

5.2.1 Differentiated Competition and Integration Potential between F1 Events and Formula E

With the development of new energy vehicles and sustainable transportation, Formula E has attracted significant attention worldwide. Future research can focus on analyzing the differences and complementarities between F1 and Formula E in terms of event branding, audience groups, technological innovation, and urban promotion. It can also explore the possibilities of collaborative development and

resource integration for these two types of events in the Chinese market, such as sharing urban race tracks, conducting joint marketing activities, or designing viewing packages, to enhance the overall racing culture and the influence of the events.

5.2.2 The Industrial Impact of Chinese Automakers Forming a Team to Participate in F1 Events

With the rapid development of China's automotive industry, FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem stated that Formula 1 is open to Chinese automakers forming teams and discussions on this matter have already been held. He pointed out that F1 should prioritize increasing the number of teams rather than just the number of races, in order to enhance the diversity and competitiveness of the sport. Future research can further explore the potential driving effect of this process on the domestic racing technology ecosystem, talent cultivation, and related derivative industries such as event operation, digital media, and auto parts, thereby providing institutional and commercial reference for China's participation in global top-level motorsport.

5.2.3 The Communication Mode of Combining Sports Event IP with Virtual Characters and AIGC Technology

With the development of Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC), virtual idols, and metaverse technologies, future research can focus on how Formula 1 (F1) events can utilize virtual images, AI-generated content, and digital IP to create an immersive and highly interactive communication model. For example, through virtual drivers, digital scenes, or AI race commentary, the sense of participation and cross-platform interaction among young audiences can be enhanced. At the same time, explore the commercial value of event IP in virtual products, digital derivatives, and social media communication.

In-depth research on the above directions can not only enrich the theoretical research foundation of F1 events in China but also provide operational strategic references for the localized operation, industrial development, and digital innovation of the events.

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