

Analysis on the Marketing Strategy of DTC Mode of Chinese pet Economy from the Perspective of Digital Marketing

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of digital economic development and increasing pet consumption, the integration of the pet economy and digital marketing has become a research focus. Existing research mainly revolves around the Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) model, focusing on three major scenarios: pet blogger-driven sales, online veterinary consultations, and physical pet transportation. Prior studies have examined how businesses can achieve direct connections with consumers through digital means. Methodologically, a combination of case studies and theoretical induction is used to compare and analyze different business models. Research shows that although the models differ in their manifestations, their core mechanisms for user conversion are consistent, primarily relying on trust building, service extension, and process assurance. The DTC model effectively promotes consumption conversion by strengthening the direct connection between businesses and consumers, and provides a reference for the standardization and sustainable development of the pet industry. The recommendations advocate a multi-level governance framework encompassing enterprises, platforms, and regulatory authorities, with an emphasis on data-driven marketing strategies, enhanced content governance, and the standardization and transparency of service systems to strengthen user trust and promote sustainable industry development.

Keywords: Pet economy; Digital marketing; DTC Model

1. Introduction

With the upgrading of national consumption and the diversified development of emotional needs in China,

pets have gradually become emotional companions for families, thereby fostering the rapid emergence of the "pet economy. According to the data of the white paper on China's pet industry, the pet consumption

market is steadily expanding, and it is expected to exceed 400 billion yuan in 2028, and the consumption scale will exceed 150 billion yuan in 2025 [1]. This data shows that China's pet economy has huge prospects. At the same time, with the rapid rise of social media and the gradual digitization of people's entertainment lifestyle, pets and digital marketing are also constantly combined in the context of the digital age, giving birth to a series of pet economic branches involving influencer-driven product promotion, online veterinary consultation, and physical pet transportation. The digital marketing model represented by these three fields not only provides an efficient and convenient consumption experience for pet lovers, but also helps to promote the overall improvement of service standardization and specialization in the pet industry. Taking the concept of digital marketing as the analysis object, this paper expounds the current situation of above fields, analyzes the digital marketing mode, explores the problems existing in the process, and puts forward corresponding suggestions for the existing problems.

2. Concept of Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a new marketing model based on the Internet as the core technology platform. Its operation basis is to take the network as the underlying architecture and systematically integrate multiple contact points such as mobile terminals, social media, search engines and digital radio and television channels. The purpose of digital marketing is to meet the needs of users, which is characterized by highly quantifiable marketing activities (such as key indicators such as click through rate and conversion rate) and strong interaction, and brand promotion and product sales are pursued as dual objectives. From the perspective of communication mechanism, digital marketing has broken through the limitations of traditional marketing information flow. It strives to establish a continuous and in-depth two-way dialogue with consumers by means of e-mail push, intra community interaction and other multiple means. In the digital marketing mode, consumers are given a high degree of autonomy, and can enjoy the convenience of all-weather shopping and the economy of cross platform price comparison. At the same time, relying on the perfect after-sales guarantee mechanism (such as the system of no reason to return goods) to reduce the purchase risk. In terms of value pursuit, this marketing paradigm pays attention to the shaping of brand image, as well as the feedback of user experience, trying to achieve the deep integration of the two. Through the precise analysis of user behavior data, enterprises can implement accurate investment, and have a full dynamic understanding of the effectiveness of activities. Therefore, they can establish effective connections with target customers through appropriate channels at the right time [2].

3. Marketing Strategy of the DTC Model

Direct to Consumer (DTC) model originated from the practice of European and American brands directly reaching consumers through their own channels. It is a disintermediary business model. This model directly responds to and meets the needs of target customers by integrating digital marketing means and relying on accurate consumer insight and personalized marketing strategies. This retail model has received widespread attention, because the brand side hopes to seek more intermediate value in the highly competitive online environment [3]. Through the DTC model, the seller can internalize the profit and eliminate other costs that are likely to be generated in the middle, such as labor costs and equipment costs, so as to better directly grasp the customer experience and obtain real-time data of consumers [4]. The 4P framework of classic sales theory (i.e. product, channel, promotion and price) provides an analysis tool for DTC mode, and DTC mode gives brands a stronger control over 4P elements: products can be rapidly iterated according to market demand; In the price dimension, DTC brand has more pricing space due to the omission of distribution level, which can provide more competitive and transparent prices; In the channel dimension, the brand directly reaches pet owners through proprietary apps, official flagship stores, etc; In the promotion dimension, brands can interact directly with target consumers through private community and blogger content, so as to accurately capture demand feedback and quickly drive product iteration [5].

3.1 Current Situation of the Pet Economy under Digital Marketing

In recent years, the development of China's pet economy has shown a significant growth trend, and the concept of "other economy" has become increasingly popular. "Its economy", also known as the pet economy, is a new economic situation endowed with emotional value, encompassing consumer activities across the entire life cycle of pets, including diet, healthcare, housing, and transportation [6]. People get soul companionship from pets and give them care and love.

China's pet economy is showing a trend of blowout growth. According to the data in the "2023-2024 China's pet industry operation and consumer market monitoring report" released by AI media consulting, the market scale of China's pet economy has achieved rapid development in just a few years.

Major internet platforms have entered the pet services segment, and meituan and jd.com have launched pet category services; Didi travel officially launched its pet travel service in August 2024; Beijing chongbida, chongdada and

other companies have successively carried out long-distance and short-distance pet transportation services; The digital medical company represented by Dingdang kuaiyao has established the online veterinary inquiry and instant delivery service; Ant insurance platform connects with many insurance companies to launch pet insurance services on Alipay platform.

In view of the current development situation of the industry and the trend of diversification of market demand, the development focus of the pet industry is gradually shifting to the direction of digitalization (such as building online consumption scenarios), specialization (such as subdividing R&D categories, providing customized services), and humanization (such as deeply cultivating the life of pet lovers).

Driven by the digital wave, digitalization enhances the efficiency of consumption, professionalization improves the core competitiveness of products and services, and humanization deepens the emotional connection between brands and users, which together form an important pillar for the high-quality development of the pet industry. As the scale of pet economy continues to expand, the consumer market has shown an obvious trend of rejuvenation and consumption upgrading. Social media, big data, short video and other digital technologies have fully penetrated all links of the industrial chain, and online channels have gradually become the main scene of pet products consumption. Digital technology not only provides consumers with richer convenience and personalized service experience, but also builds a platform for sharing the experience of pampering groups. At the same time, these technologies help enterprises expand market share and significantly improve market competitiveness by improving service quality and enhancing user dependence.

3.2 DTC Contact Points in Three Areas: Pet Influencer Marketing, Online Consultation, and Physical Transportation of Pets

Pet influencer-driven product sales fall under the category of social content e-commerce, with the core objective of converting social trust into sales. Pet influencers on various social media platforms share their daily interactions with their pets, subtly building a sense of trust with their followers—a direct DTC (Direct-to-Consumer) touchpoint. In videos or livestreams, influencers showcase real-life scenarios of pets using products, problem-solving processes, and the product's immediate response, effectively triggering purchase intentions by reducing information asymmetry between consumers and brands. More importantly, influencers provide real-time interaction and answers through comments and fan groups, alleviating users' concerns regarding after-sales service. Once followers are guided to join the brand's private community, the

influencer continues to share pet care knowledge, gradually shifting user trust from the individual influencer to the overall brand, thus solidifying and strengthening brand loyalty.

Pet transportation, on the other hand, is a service that integrates online and offline channels, primarily addressing owners' concerns about geographical distance and their inability to personally attend to their pets during transit. The biggest pain point in pet transportation is owners' concerns about their pets suffering from poor diet, emotional distress, and lack of care during long journeys. The physical pet transport solution makes the entire process transparent: pets can be tracked in real-time via a mini-program, and real-time cameras are installed inside the vehicle, and drivers periodically send short video updates to confirm the pets' safe condition during the journey. This end-to-end visibility reduces the anxiety of owners who are not with their pets. After the pet arrives safely, a pet information card is attached to record the journey's events. Owners are then guided to scan a QR code to join a local pet-owning group, enabling further promotion and marketing, such as recommending pet supplies. Thus, a one-time transportation service transforms into a long-term social connection.

Online consultations are a typical form of digitalized pet healthcare services. Their core objective is to overcome the high time costs and geographical barriers of traditional in-person veterinary care by offering readily accessible mobile services, meeting users' urgent need for convenient pet health management. The platform embeds a "one-click medication purchase" function into the consultation interface. Doctors recommend medications based on medical records, and users can place orders without needing to navigate to a different page, achieving a complete service loop from consultation to medication purchase. This model effectively extends the DTC (Direct-to-Consumer) touchpoint chain, transforming medical consultations into direct consumption scenarios and significantly improving the platform's monetization efficiency. At the same time, electronic health records are created for pets, with the system automatically recording vaccination dates and deworming cycles, sending reminder messages with exclusive coupons when they are due. In this way, pet medical care, which is relatively low-frequency compared to other pet services, becomes a high-frequency care service that reaches users every month, such as sending advertisements to remind pet owners to bring their pets for check-ups and other medical services.

4. Literature References

4.1 Transformation Based on Social Trust: Analysis of Pet Bloggers' Marketing Strategies

in Live Commerce

Previous studies have shown that the core mechanism of pet influencers' product promotion lies in "trust generation and its transformation into purchasing behavior". Different literatures have different interpretations of this process. On the issue of "where does trust come from", some studies emphasize the content and emotional factors. Li, Z.Y. pointed out that pet short videos meet users' emotional expectations through cute image and emotional expression [6]. In this process, bloggers strengthen their professional image by sharing pet care knowledge, allowing users to form continuous attention and dependence while obtaining practical information. In this process, users gradually form a sense of maturity for bloggers, which echoes the theory of "quasi social relations" in communication science - long-term one-way contact can generate emotional bonds resembling those found in authentic interpersonal relationships, thus becoming the psychological basis for the formation of trust.

Lv, J.M. et al. further explains the formation mechanism of trust from the perspective of "cloud Nurturing" [7]. The literature points out that on the interactive platform of Tik Tok, users form interest groups around pet content through likes, comments, forwarding and other behaviors, and continuously strengthen the relationship and identity between each other in the process of interaction. In this process, pets serve not only as the subject of content but also as a medium through which users express and share their emotions- their lovely image and emotional expression constitute a common emotional symbol, which helps to form an emotional community in the user group, and then strengthen the group identity. With the increase of interaction frequency, the relationship between users is gradually strengthened, and the sense of belonging and mutual trust within the group are also strengthened. This interactive relationship formed on the dithering platform will also affect the user's behavior mode. For example, some users began to actively participate in content creation, publishing pet videos or secondary creation (making expression packs, peripheral, etc.) promoted the continuous dissemination of content in the platform; In addition, with the deepening of emotional investment, users are more likely to accept pet products or services recommended by bloggers, making the content consumption gradually transition to commodity consumption. This shows that the platform environment not only promotes trust, but also accelerates the transformation from trust to consumption.

On the issue of "how trust affects purchase", Liu, S.Q. put more emphasis on rational judgment factors [8]. Liu, S.Q. found through empirical analysis that factors such as the influencer's professionalism, the completeness of product information, and the livestreaming atmosphere significantly influence users' perceived value, so as to improve

the purchase intention. This study shows that even if users have generated trust, the ultimate purchase decision still hinges on consumers' rational evaluation of both the product and the influencer.

Gao, M. X et al. pointed out from a macro perspective that the Internet platform can systematically reduce information asymmetry through the integration and accurate matching of user behavior data (such as personalized recommendation and interest tag construction), so as to enhance the overall trust foundation of consumers and create a favorable trading environment for online pet consumption. This shows that the platform mechanism is also an external factor affecting trust [9].

The conclusion of the above research is the same: the transformation process of pet bloggers carrying goods can be divided into two stages. In the early stage, trust is built through content and interaction, and in the later stage, purchase is achieved through product information and anchor ability. This shows that in DTC mode, it is not enough to rely solely on "emotional marketing", but also need to cooperate with specialization and information transparency. In short, researchers can understand the existing research as: there are actually two kinds of trust in pet bloggers' delivery: one is affective trust based on emotional connection and continuous interaction, and the other is cognitive trust based on information quality and professionalism. Both of them work together to ultimately promote users' purchase behavior.

4.2 Reach Based on Service Extension: Marketing Strategy Analysis of Online Consultation

At present, the number of literatures on pet online consultation is relatively limited, and the existing studies are mostly conducted from the perspective of entrepreneurial practice or industry analysis, and the systematic discussion on its marketing mechanism is still insufficient. In the existing research, Hu, T. made a relatively complete analysis of the market demand and operation mode of the online pet consultation platform from the perspective of entrepreneurial projects [10]. At the level of market demand, with the development of pet economy, the demand for pet health management continues to increase, while traditional offline medical treatment has limitations in terms of high time cost and lack of convenience. In this context, online consultation provides more timely health management support through remote services, serving as an important complement to traditional in-person veterinary care. From the perspective of service marketing, the emergence of this form is essentially a kind of service extension - that is, beyond the original service boundary, to expand the accessibility of services through digital channels. The premise of reaching users is precisely the accurate response to the real pain points of users; In terms

of specific implementation, the research emphasizes that services should be oriented toward user needs, and the consultation process should be streamlined, the medical resources should be integrated, and personalized pet care suggestions should be provided to continuously improve the user experience. The service content should also be gradually extended from a single inquiry to pet health management, so that the platform can continue to play a role in the daily pet care process of users. This change from "single point service" to "continuous service" helps to enhance user stickiness, so as to achieve more stable touch; By cooperating with offline pet hospitals and doctors, the brand can further improve the service system, which helps to enhance the platform's professionalism, increase user trust, and open up online and offline scenarios, so that users may be exposed to platform services in different situations, and expand the overall reach range; At the operational level, the research proposes to improve the platform exposure through user label division and hierarchical management, refined operation, and multi-channel promotion. This method can improve the conversion rate of users to a certain extent, and also reflect the active touch characteristics of online consultation in marketing.

4.3 Closed Loop Based on Physical Experience: Analysis of Marketing Strategy for Physical Transportation of Pets

The existing research on pet transportation mainly focuses on legal risks and transportation norms. Pets, as living animals, have special attributes different from ordinary commodities in the process of trading, and their transportation links have high risks, involving infectious disease prevention and control, health status monitoring and other issues. This particularity means that in DTC mode, transportation service is not only a logistics link, but also an important marketing contact point that affects consumers' brand evaluation and repurchase intention. In DTC mode, enterprises complete transactions directly to consumers, which means that the transportation link is no longer a simple logistics problem, but an important part that affects the overall consumer experience of users. Zhang, D. T., & Zhao, Y. pointed out at the legal level that some sellers shipped live animals via standard courier services and deliberately concealed the nature of the transported cargo [11]. This behavior violates relevant laws and regulations. For example, the transportation of live animals requires a quarantine certificate and is completed by a qualified subject. In case of pet death or dispute during transportation, the seller usually needs to bear the responsibility. This shows that in DTC mode, enterprises need not only complete sales, but also be responsible for the delivery process, otherwise it will directly affect consumer trust and brand image. Because pets have strong emotional

attributes, once problems occur in the transportation process, consumers will not only face direct economic losses, but also have strong negative emotions; In the context of the high popularity of social media, such negative experiences can spread rapidly through comments, short videos, and other channels, causing irreparable damage to the enterprise's brand image. Therefore, compared with the price factor, the standardization and safety of transportation have gradually become an important basis for user decision-making. In this process, transportation services actually become the key contact in the relationship between enterprises and consumers. In terms of optimizing the route, sun, F. Q. proposed that the transportation quality can be improved by means of technical means [12]. For example, by implanting electronic chips into pets, they can realize the dynamic monitoring of identity recognition, information recording and even health status. This not only helps to reduce the risk of pet loss or abandonment, but more importantly, the visualization and traceability of the transportation process can effectively reduce the uncertainty of consumers' information, thereby enhancing their overall sense of trust in the transaction - which is logically consistent with the cognitive trust formation mechanism analyzed above.

5. Recommendation

5.1 Enterprise Level

Firstly, strengthen the construction of first-party data assets, rely on the accumulation of user behavior data on the proprietary platform to provide basic support for precision marketing; Secondly, build a private domain operation system with content as the core, and achieve deep user connection through blogger content and community interaction; third, promote service standardization and transparency, enhance user trust and repurchase willingness with high-quality service experience, and form sustainable brand assets.

5.2 Platform Level

Platforms play a crucial role in content distribution within the pet economy, while also influencing user decisions. Therefore, the review of pet-related content should be strengthened, with a focus on regulating false advertising and exaggerated information to reduce misleading behavior. Regarding traffic allocation, platforms could appropriately optimize their algorithms, incorporating content quality and professional evaluation alongside traffic metrics. This would guide high-quality content to gain more exposure, promoting a healthy content ecosystem. Furthermore, the evaluation and feedback mechanisms should be improved to enhance transparency, enabling

users to make judgments based on their actual experiences and thereby increasing overall trust levels.

5.3 Regulatory Level

It is recommended that regulatory authorities accelerate the development of legislation to standardize advertising for pet food and supplies, including clear criteria for identifying false advertising and corresponding penalties; promoting the establishment of a credit rating system for the pet industry, classifying and managing companies based on service quality, complaint records, and other indicators, and regularly publishing the rating results to the public, thereby establishing an effective dual-governance framework combining market self-regulation and external oversight. When regulating pet transportation, relevant departments should establish laws and regulations for pet transportation; raise the standards and thresholds for companies undertaking pet transportation; guide companies to use technology to make the transportation process visible and enhance transparency and establish strong consumer rights protection channels so that consumers can more effectively protect their rights in case of disputes, while ensuring the safety of pets and reducing abandonment and death caused by transportation problems.

6. Conclusion

This paper analyzes several typical forms of the DTC (Direct-to-Consumer) model in China's pet economy from a digital marketing perspective, mainly including pet blogger-driven sales, online veterinary consultations, and physical pet transportation. The analysis reveals that although these three models differ in their manifestations, they all rely on factors such as trust building, service extension, and transportation guarantees to achieve user conversion. Essentially, they are all processes that directly connect businesses and consumers, gradually promoting consumption. Based on this, the paper proposes improvement suggestions from three levels: enterprises, platforms, and regulators, such as improving product and service quality, optimizing platform content management, and perfecting relevant regulations. These suggestions have certain reference value for the development of the pet

industry in reality. Overall, this paper helps to further understand the development path of the pet economy in the digital environment and also provides some directions for future research.

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