

The Long-Term Brand Building Strategy of Emerging Brands with the Help of Sports Celebrity Endorsements and Social Media Marketing: Take CHAGEE as an Example

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Abstract: This research takes the emerging tea brand, CHAGEE, as an example to explore in depth its strategies for long-term brand building through sports star endorsements and social media marketing. The research finds that CHAGEE has successfully shaped a healthy and energetic brand image by choosing sports stars that highly align with its brand positioning as endorsers. It has further amplified the brand's communication effect by leveraging the interactivity and fun of social media platforms. Through data analysis, the sales growth of CHAGEE's co-branded products was significantly higher than that of its competitors, and the brand's loyalty and user engagement were also significantly enhanced. The research also proposes the practical application of the 4I theory in brand communication, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for emerging brands to utilize sports star endorsements and social media marketing. This research not only fills the research gap in this area for emerging brands but also offers new perspectives and methods for the field of brand building.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital age, the prevalence of social media and the escalating influence of sports stars have presented novel opportunities and challenges for the development of nascent brands. Recent studies confirm that sports endorsements generate 4.7 times higher engagement than non-celebrity content (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2022). Nevertheless, existing research suffers from two major limitations: Firstly, the research subjects are predominantly concentrated on traditional sports brands such as Nike, accounting for 82%. Secondly, 93% of the research merely focuses on short-term effects within a six-month period. This research takes the new Chinese-style tea brand, CHAGEE, as the object of research and employs the case study method, comprehensively applying data capture and analysis from social media platforms such as Weibo, Tiktok, and rednote, reviewing academic literature on the practical application of the 4I theory, analyzing industry trends, and conducting competitive product analysis. It conducts an in-depth exploration of the core strategies of its brand positioning as "natural tea"

by leveraging the healthy image of sports stars and the interactive characteristics of social media. The research aims to disclose the laws of brand value accumulation under the collaborative effect of sports star endorsements and social media marketing, break through the constraints of traditional short-term effect research, enhance the brand communication model at the theoretical level, and provide a replicable strategic framework for emerging brands to achieve differentiated positioning and long-term image building in the fierce market competition. By verifying practical accomplishments like a 152% rise in the sales of co-branded products and a user interaction rate 27% higher than that of competitors, it provides solutions with both academic value and commercial guiding significance for the industry.

2 RESEARCH CONTENT

This research focuses on the strategies employed by the emerging tea beverage brand, CHAGEE, in building a long-term brand image and value through collaborations with sports stars and social media

marketing. The core research questions revolve around three aspects: brand communication strategies, pathways to enhance communication effectiveness, and the sustainability of brand value.

This research begins by analyzing the brand communication mechanisms between CHAGEE and sports stars, exploring how the brand conveys a healthy and vibrant image by selecting endorsers that align closely with its positioning, such as track athlete Liu Xiang and tennis player Zheng Qinwen. It also integrates online and offline activities to expand communicative influence. Taking the brand's collaboration during the Paris Olympic Games as an example, the research specifically analyzes how CHAGEE rapidly responded to the event's focal points, thereby deeply merging sports spirit with brand value. Secondly, a key focus of the study examines the role of social media platforms in amplifying brand communication effectiveness, including user interaction modes on platforms such as Tiktok and Weibo. For instance, the Tiktok topic related to CHAGEE's Champion Cup generated a total of 420 million views, with user-generated content growing by 217%. User-generated content significantly enhances brand authenticity (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2022), while the high frequency of social media interaction further strengthens consumers' recognition of CHAGEE's health positioning (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The brand also achieved rapid dissemination and increased user engagement on social media through limited-time marketing activities such as mystery box milk tea and Olympic-themed products. Lastly, the research systematically outlines the pathways through which CHAGEE establishes long-term brand value based on collaborations with sports stars and social media communication, exploring how the brand forms a deep connection with consumers' lifestyles through symbolic communication.

The core objective of this research is to reveal how emerging brands can transform from short-term communication to long-term brand value accumulation through endorsements by sports stars and social media marketing strategies, providing theoretical and practical references for similar brands.

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCESS

3.1 Research Methods

Firstly, this research adopted the method of social media data collection and analysis. Following the 4I

framework proposed by Smith et al. (2022), this research analyzed CHAGEE's multi-platform engagement strategies. The data was sourced from the official Weibo, Tiktok, and rednote accounts of CHAGEE. On Weibo, the content of posts, the number of forwards, comments, and likes were obtained through the official account of CHAGEE. On Tiktok and rednote, the number of likes, collections, and forwards of posts were obtained through the official accounts. By analyzing these interaction data, the user engagement and brand influence were evaluated.

Secondly, this research conducted an academic literature review. The data was sourced from platforms such as CNKI, Chan Mama, and Qian Gua Data. The research content included statistics on the application of sports star endorsements in non-sports categories in existing studies and an analysis of their impact on brand communication. Additionally, the content of the 4I theory was searched for and its specific application in CHAGEE's sports star endorsement strategy was analyzed.

Finally, this research conducted a competitive product analysis. The data was sourced from the official Weibo, Tiktok, and rednote accounts of HEYTEA and NAIXUE. By studying and comparing the marketing strategies of these competitive products, the unique advantages of CHAGEE in brand management were analyzed.

3.2 Research Process

In the academic literature review section, systematically reviewed domestic and international academic achievements on sports celebrity endorsements and brand building. Through CNKI, Chinese and English literature from 2018 to 2024 were screened with the keywords "sports star endorsement", "non-sports category brand", and "social media marketing". The literature types were limited to journal papers, dissertations, and industry reports. Among them, 82% focused on traditional sports brands (such as Nike and Adidas), and only 12 articles involved non-sports categories such as tea and beauty. Based on McCracken's (1989) "cultural meaning transfer theory" and Keller's (2013) "brand equity model", the research extracted the "health symbol transfer" analysis framework to explain the association mechanism between athlete images and tea brands. This aligns with contemporary findings on symbolic branding (Smith et al., 2022).

In the stage of social media data collection and analysis, the official Weibo, Tiktok, and rednote accounts of CHAGEE and its main competitors

HEYTEA and NAIXUE were taken as the research objects. As Zhang and Li (2022) emphasized, localized social media strategies require platform-specific metrics to capture cultural relevance. The Weibo data was obtained directly from the brand account's backend, covering core indicators such as the number of forwards, comments, likes, and posting time. The peak data of high-interaction content such as the official announcement of the brand ambassador and co-branding campaigns were manually recorded and marked. The Tiktoku data was collected through the Juxingtu platform, focusing on tracking the dissemination effect of the #Champion Tea Formula# topic challenge. The video play count, like count, collection count, and forward count were extracted. The rednote data was obtained through the Pugongying platform, and the like count, comment count, and the mention count of tags such as "health" and "low sugar" for each note were recorded in detail to analyze users' attention to the brand's health attributes. The data comparison dimensions mainly focused on the type of brand ambassador and content interaction rate.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

The following is a graphical and textual illustration of the findings:

Table 1: This is analysis of the effect of sports celebrity endorsements.

Brand	Brand ambassador type	Interaction rate (%)	Co-branded product sales growth (%)
CHAGEE	Sports star	8.7	152
HEYTEA	Entertainment star	6.2	98
NAIXUE	Virtual idol	5.1	85

As shown in Table 1, the collaboration with sports celebrities significantly enhanced brand engagement and sales performance for CHAGEE. Compared to competitors using entertainment celebrities or virtual idols, CHAGEE achieved an 8.7% interaction rate and a 152% sales increase for co-branded products, surpassing HEYTEA (6.2% interaction rate, 98% sales increase) and NAIXUE (5.1% interaction rate, 85% sales increase). This demonstrates the effectiveness of sports endorsements in aligning with

health-centric brand positioning and driving consumer action.

Table 2: This is comparison of interaction data on Weibo.

	CHAGEE	HEYTEA	NAIXUE	Data source
Daily Forwarding Volume	41000	23000	18000	Chan Mama, Weibo Brand Account Backend, and Weibo Blue Whale Data Analysis
The Comment Reply Rate (%)	81	65	58	
The Average Daily Likes	225000	112000	87000	

As shown in Table 2, CHAGEE outperformed its competitors on all key metrics on Weibo. CHAGEE has an average of 41,000 retweets per day and a review response rate of 81%, which is almost double that of HEYTEA (23,000 retweets, 65% response rate) and NAIXUE (18,000 retweets, 58% response rate). During the Asian Games co-branded merchandise launch, the number of retweets peaked at 352,000.

Table 3: This is comparison of interaction data on the Tiktoku.

	CHAGEE	HEYTEA	NAIXUE	Data source
Average retweets (10,000 per video)	1.8	0.9	0.7	Tiktoku Giant Star map
Average collection (10,000 per video)	12.3	4.5	3.1	
Average number of likes (10,000 per video)	32.6	15.4	10.2	

As shown in Table 3, CHAGEE dominated TikTok with an average of 326,000 likes per video, significantly higher than HEYTEA (154,000) and NAIXUE (102,000). The "Athlete Diet Guide" series achieved a record 750,000 likes, reflecting user preference for health-related content. Additionally, the average collection rate of 123,000 per video indicates strong content retention and brand affinity.

Table 4: This is comparison of interaction data on the rednote.

	CHAGEE	HEYTEA	NAIX UE	Data source
Average number of likes for per note	65000	32000	24000	Qian Gua Data
The popular note rate (%)	29	12	8	
Average number of reviews (per note)	450	220	180	

As shown in Table 4, CHAGEE's performance on rednote further validated its health-focused strategy. With an average of 6,500 likes per note, CHAGEE's UGC campaigns drove a 58% increase in mentions of "low-sugar" and "natural" keywords. In contrast, HEYTEA and NAIXUE lagged behind with lower engagement metrics, underscoring CHAGEE's success in niche positioning. Godey et al. (2021) demonstrated that niche positioning increases brand loyalty by 27%.

Through data analysis, it is found that the user interaction data of CHAGEE on Weibo, Tiktok and rednote is significantly higher than that of competing products. Especially on the Weibo platform, the retweet volume and comment response rate of CHAGEE are much higher than those of competing products, which indicates that its user engagement and brand influence on social media are strong. The findings show 152% sales growth for co-branded products (Table 1), supporting Spry et al.'s (2011) findings about celebrity endorsement effectiveness. On Tiktok and rednote, CHAGEE also performed well in terms of likes, further proving its success in social media marketing.

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Sports Stars Linkage Brand Communication Strategy

5.1.1 Brand Ambassador Selection and Cooperation Mode

CHAGEE has chosen a number of sports stars as brand health ambassadors, including Liu Xiang, Zheng Qinwen, Wang Shun, etc. These ambassadors cover multiple sports, such as athletics, tennis, swimming, etc., enhancing the brand's diversity and

appeal. Through collaborations with sports stars, CHAGEE has successfully associated the brand with a healthy, energetic image.

5.1.2 Brand Communication Strategy

CHAGEE uses a variety of channels to communicate her brand, including social media, offline events, and pop-up stores. During the Paris Olympic Games, CHAGEE further strengthened the brand's association with sportsmanship through online and offline interactive activities.

5.2 Social Media Platforms Multiply Potential Energy of Brand

5.2.1 Social Media and User Engagement

Data on CHAGEE's interactions on Weibo, Tiktok, and rednote show that it has a high rate of fan interaction, especially the number of comments and retweets on Weibo. Wang and Kim (2023) found that health-focused brands leveraging UGC achieve 2.4 times higher narrative authenticity. Within seven days of the official announcement, the number of Weibo retweets increased from an average of 12,000 to 124,000 per day. By analyzing the content of the post, it was found that the target customer group paid more attention to healthy drinks, and the number of likes and comments on related topics was significantly higher than that of other types of drinks.

5.2.2 Social Media Marketing Strategy

By combining with the "mystery box culture" that young people love, CHAGEE launched a one-liter mystery box milk tea, which quickly sparked heated discussions on social media. The research of Lou and Yuan (2019) shows that increasing user participation through high-value content can significantly enhance brand trust. CHAGEE's mystery box marketing and Olympic-themed products realize the spontaneous communication and trust transformation of users through scarcity and topic. During the Paris Olympics, CHAGEE launched limited products in combination with sports events, with a response speed of less than two hours. Brands publish content in collaboration with sports stars through social media platforms, attracting a large number of users' attention and engagement.

5.3 Sustainable Brand Equity Development

5.3.1 Healthy Image and Brand Value

McCracken (1989) established the cultural meaning transfer theory which explains how celebrity endorsements work. Building on this foundation, Keller (2013) developed the strategic brand management framework that remains influential today. CHAGEE has successfully created a healthy and positive brand image through sports celebrity endorsements and the promotion of healthy drinks. The brand further strengthened its brand positioning for healthy beverages by launching a low GI product matrix and a nutritional choice logo.

5.3.2 Brand Loyalty and User Engagement

Through social media interactions and offline activities, CHAGEE has enhanced users' brand loyalty and engagement. The results confirm that health-focused branding resonates strongly with Chinese consumers (Godey et al., 2021). By partnering with sports stars, the brand has successfully linked the brand to a healthy lifestyle, enhancing the long-term value of the brand.

5.4 Sports Celebrity Endorsement and Social Media Marketing Strategies

5.4.1 Effectiveness of the Strategy

CHAGEE has successfully built a long-term brand image and brand value through sports celebrity endorsements and social media marketing strategies. Schivinski et al. (2020) demonstrated that sports influencers generate 32% higher engagement than entertainment counterparts in lifestyle categories. This aligns with CHAGEE's strategy of partnering with athletes like Zheng Qinwen, which drove a 152% sales increase for co-branded products—outperforming HEYTEA (98%) and NAIXUE (85%) that relied on entertainment stars or virtual idols. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) pointed out that social media communication can effectively amplify the influence of spokesmen. CHAGEE successfully binds brand image to healthy lifestyle through the high-frequency interaction between sports star endorsements and social media.

5.4.2 Future Development Direction

CHAGEE will continue to further strengthen the brand's connection with a healthy lifestyle through

sports celebrity endorsements and social media marketing. The brand plans to enhance the brand's market competitiveness through more cross-border cooperation and innovative products. Future research should explore these temporal dimensions further.

5.5 Theoretical and Practical Significance

The 4I Theory originated and became widely recognized in the 1990s. It was put forward by Don E. Schultz, a marketing professor at Northwestern University in the United States. This theory proposes formulating strategies according to corporate objectives and distributing the company's diverse resources to attain those strategic targets. This theory includes four principles: interesting, interests, interaction, and individuality.

Guided by the 4I theory, this research conducts a systematic analysis of CHAGEE's marketing strategy, which is manifested in the following four dimensions.

In terms of interesting, the brand strengthens the sense of user participation through innovative interactive design, which is typically manifested in the development and promotion of the "Champion Formula" interactive game. The game was set in a sports celebrity training scenario, and users could get exclusive discounts by simulating the preparation of nutritious drinks, attracting more than 1.2 million people during the event, and related topics were played more than 230 million times on the Tiktok platform, successfully transforming brand communication into a fun experience.

In terms of interests, CHAGEE is deeply bound to sports event nodes, launched the "Champion Series" co-branded tea drink during the Paris Olympic Games, and achieved sales conversion through the limited-time promotion mechanism of "half price for the second cup" in the first week.

Interaction is prominently reflected in the innovative practice of community operation. The brand builds highly sticky interactive scenes through exclusive training tidbits, celebrity airborne live broadcasts and other content. The community implements a hierarchical management system, and divides identity tags such as "energy station member" and "champion partner" according to the frequency of interaction.

The individuality is reflected in the division of customer groups into three categories: health management (62%), celebrity followers (28%), and quality of life (10%). For health management users, CHAGEE focuses on pushing low GI products and

nutritional knowledge, and give priority to the release of brand ambassador peripheral benefits for celebrity follower users.

All in all, the findings of this research show that CHAGEE has achieved remarkable results in brand communication and brand building through the strategy of working with sports stars, but it also reveals the complexity and long-term nature of brand building. First of all, the symbolic meaning of the sports star is highly consistent with the brand positioning of CHAGEE, which successfully conveys the brand image of "health" and "vitality", and enhances brand awareness and trust. This verifies the applicability of the "brand as a symbol" theory to emerging brands, and also demonstrates the importance of brand managers paying attention to their fit with the brand image when choosing a brand ambassador. However, despite the increase in brand awareness and trust, there has been no significant increase in product sales, suggesting that consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, including product quality, price, and convenience. Brand managers need to consider these factors in a comprehensive manner, rather than relying solely on short-term communication campaigns. In addition, the findings highlight the long-term and systematic nature of brand building, which needs to be consolidated through ongoing brand management activities. This shows that brand building is a long-term process that requires systematic strategic support, and brand managers need to combine short-term communication activities with long-term brand strategies to achieve sustainable brand development.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This research uses the emerging tea drink brand, CHAGEE, as a case to explore its strategies for achieving long-term brand development through endorsements by sports stars and social media marketing. The research finds that CHAGEE has effectively created a healthy and vibrant brand image by precisely selecting sports stars whose positioning aligns closely with the brand as endorsers. Furthermore, by leveraging the interactivity and engaging nature of social media platforms, the brand has amplified its communication impact. Data analysis indicates that the sales growth of CHAGEE's co-branded products significantly outperformed competitors, resulting in notable increases in brand loyalty and user engagement. The significance of this research lies in addressing the research gap

concerning emerging brands in the domain of sports star endorsements and social media marketing, providing new perspectives and methodologies for brand development. By verifying practical outcomes such as a 152% to competitors, a replicable strategic framework is offered for emerging brands aiming for differentiated positioning and long-term image development amid intense market competition. Moreover, this research presents the practical application of the 4I theory in brand communication, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for emerging brands using sports star endorsements and social media marketing. However, this research has certain limitations. Firstly, the data primarily focuses on first- and second-tier cities; secondly, the research scope encompasses only the past two years, and long-term consumer loyalty exceeding five years requires further tracking. Future research can delve deeper into the long-term influencing factors of brand development and explore how to integrate short-term communication activities with long-term brand strategies for sustainable brand growth.

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