

The Replicability of Duolingo's Marketing Strategies and the Limitations of Its Future Development

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Abstract: Although the image of Duolingo's mascot is interesting and appealing, there are certain risks associated with the excessive entertainment of the brand image. Overemphasizing entertainment and fun, along with overly exaggerated behaviors, may run counter to the essence of Duolingo as a learning app. Excessive entertainment and frequent participation in entertainment events may affect users' perception of the brand's professionalism and reliability. With a large number of users from different countries and with diverse cultural backgrounds, how Duolingo can properly continue to use entertainment marketing is a question that it needs to ponder in the future. In general, Duolingo's online marketing approach is a successful one, but there is still a certain degree of uncertainty in its future development. Maintaining its uniqueness and taking a multifaceted approach are aspects that Duolingo's marketing should consider in the future.

1 INTRODUCTION

Marketing has been defined and characterized in multiple ways that are often inconsistent, but generally vague, and have evolved over time (Ferrell and Ferrell, 2025). In recent years, the field of marketing research has shown a growing concern for consumer well-being (Peterson, 2025). There are many reasons why Duolingo's marketing has made it stand out. Firstly, it is the creation of its mascot. The behaviors of its mascot, Duo, have been highly exaggerated. This form of interaction is adept at evoking emotional fluctuations among users. In terms of creating topics and hotspots, it is skilled at leveraging major popular events and festivals to build momentum for itself, and it is good at establishing connections between itself and these events or festivals. The topics it creates are also bold, novel, and even somewhat outrageous. These marketing operations have quickly sparked heated discussions on the Internet, increasing the brand's exposure. In terms of social media interaction, it has launched activities on multiple social platforms and frequently interacted with users on each platform. Its "teasing" replies are also very humorous. This kind of interaction enhances users' sense of participation and makes them feel the brand's care and attention.

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on consumer well-being in the field of marketing research (Zhao and Tsubaki, 2025). Duolingo's gamified learning is also a major highlight. It packages the dull and repetitive process of learning into a gaming process, sets up leaderboards, an achievement system, and provides exaggerated and humorous positive feedback from multiple mascots. This model allows users to obtain the fun and sense of achievement of a game during the usage process. Duolingo also has its own forward-looking perspective, as it is one of the first applications to use artificial intelligence.

In recent years, as consumer preferences have become more diverse and people increasingly value interesting experiences, the traditional marketing model has become difficult to adapt to the new trends. Online marketing emphasizes interesting interactions with consumers through new ideas. While attracting consumers' attention to the brand, it enhances emotional resonance and brand influence, gradually becoming a favorable model for enterprises to shape their brands.

However, online marketing also faces some practical problems in practice. For example, it is difficult to grasp whether the intensity of using internet memes will easily trigger controversy, and whether it will cause public disgust and affect the brand image. If the marketing content always closely

follows following the trends too much will lead to a lack of the brand's original essence. If there is insufficient innovation in the later stage or the innovation fails to achieve the previous effect, users will become fatigued, resulting in a decline in both the users' attention to the brand and their sense of freshness. This article takes Duolingo as an example to analyze the impact of online marketing on the brand image, aiming to provide inspiration for enterprises to adapt to the new marketing trends.

2 INTRODUCTION TO DUOLINGO

Duolingo was founded in Pittsburgh, the United States in 2012 and entered the Chinese market in 2019. It has an extremely large user base, covering multiple countries and ethnic groups. The range of languages offered by Duolingo is also remarkably diverse. It provides courses in over 40 languages. While covering popular languages such as English, Japanese, Korean, and French, it also includes less common languages and endangered languages like Welsh and Navajo, and even Dothraki from Game of Thrones.

Its course content is comprehensive and varied, demonstrated by the fact that it covers the four aspects of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each piece of learning content is organized into various real-life scenarios.

In addition, Duolingo has the following characteristics in its course delivery. Firstly, it gamifies the learning process. It transforms the learning process into elements of a game, with features such as experience points, levels, and challenges. Users can earn experience points to level up, unlock new content and functions by completing tasks, and receive rewards like virtual badges by finishing challenges. Secondly, its teaching is personalized. Duolingo conducts tests with the help of AI, and customizes courses according to the users' language proficiency shown in the test results, providing suitable learning content and difficulty levels. It also reminds users to review in a quirky way.

It also provides other related services. The first is the Duolingo English Test (DET), which can be taken at home via a computer and webcam without the need for an appointment or a visit to a test center. It uses computer adaptive technology to adjust the difficulty of the questions according to the test-taker's level. The entire test takes about 60 minutes, and the test results will be sent to the registered email address

within 48 hours after the test. The results of this test are recognized by many foreign institutions. In some institutions, it can replace the IELTS and TOEFL for college applications.

The second is Duolingo ABC, a learning app specifically designed for children aged 3 to 8. Through phonics lessons and stories, it helps younger children learn to read and write. The third is Duolingo Math, which provides math teaching in an interesting way. Students can use this course to catch up with their classroom progress, and adults can also use it to exercise their brains and improve their mathematical thinking abilities.

3 ANALYSIS OF DUOLINGO'S MARKETING STRATEGY

Duolingo's success can be attributed in large part to the significant role that marketing has played in its market growth (López, Muñoz, Sepúlveda, & Barraza, 2025). Duo-lingo's marketing strategy has many merits worthy of learning. Firstly, it has created a vivid mascot. Its IP, the green owl Duo, has been given many exaggerated behaviors and mannerisms. This makes the image of the owl distinctive and relatable to everyday life. It is like a friend beside users, constantly motivating them to study seriously. Sometimes, it even shows a bit of temper, which makes the image of the green owl more vivid in the hearts of users.

The interaction between Duo and users is also an important reason for Duolingo's marketing success. It is constantly being mischievous and can get angry when users do not listen to its advice to study. This form of interaction is adept at triggering emotional fluctuations among users, evoking different emotions in them.

Duolingo's approach to creating hot topics on social media is also commendable. Firstly, they are bold and innovative. When integrating current hot events or festivals, they do not let these other events overshadow their brand. Instead, they focus more on establishing a connection between their brand and these events, rather than simply combining the two. In terms of social media interaction, it has launched activities on multiple social platforms and interacted frequently with users on each platform. Its witty replies are very humorous. Through interaction, it stimulates consumers' perception and evokes a sense of warmth, thus improving consumers' attitudes (Qi, Liu, & Huang, 2025).

The green owl Duo has its own social media accounts and sometimes posts about its daily life on them. This makes users feel as if there really is such a green owl existing in their lives. This kind of interaction enhances users' sense of participation and makes them feel the brand's care and attention. Other brands can also be more proactive in interacting with users on social media during their marketing efforts. They can even adopt the mode of having the application "talk" to users, which can make the mascot livelier and achieve the effect of establishing a connection with users.

Duolingo analyzes the possibility of anti-consumption by positioning according to different communication appeals. In creating topics and hotspots, Duolingo is good at leveraging major popular events and festivals to build momentum for itself. It is skilled at establishing connections between itself and these events or festivals. The topics it creates are also bold, novel, and even a bit outrageous. These marketing operations have quickly sparked heated discussions on the Internet, increasing the brand's exposure. (Andrea and Marja, 2024)

Among learning applications, Duolingo uses entertainment modes such as level-clearing and interaction to stimulate users' interest and increase user stickiness. Just as its slogan goes, "The platform's gamified approach to language acquisition has revolutionized the way people approach this endeavor, making it a fun and rewarding pursuit." Its approach makes learning more enjoyable, which has great reference value for learning-type applications.

However, this marketing method is not without its drawbacks, and there are still certain limitations to its future development. Firstly, although Duolingo's marketing method is unique, with the continuous emergence of similar marketing techniques in the market, it is a question that needs to be studied whether users will become tired of it or experience aesthetic fatigue. Consumer attribution, psychological processes, social media amplification, consumer empowerment, and cultural shifts are all issues that need to be considered. (Cui, van Esch, Brad Efridge, Ladow, & Northey, 2025). Moreover, if in the future Duolingo cannot continuously and effectively tap into popular hot topics like it does at present, and fails to output innovative, fresh, and interesting content with its own uniqueness, and if such a situation occurs and persists for a period of time, its marketing effect will be greatly reduced, and it will be difficult to continue to attract users' attention and participation in the later stage. Since many of today's cutting-edge technological advancements are

closely related to marketing (Grewal et al., 2025). How Duolingo will integrate with AI in the future is also one of the issues it needs to consider. Emerging technologies in marketing can bring sustainable benefits, but they can also cause damage to the environment, economy, and society (Beninger and Robson, 2025).

Secondly, although the image of the green owl is interesting and appealing, there is a certain risk associated with the excessive entertainment of the brand image. Overemphasizing entertainment and fun, along with overly exaggerated behaviors, may run counter to the essence of Duo-lingo as a learning applet. Excessive entertainment and frequent participation in entertainment events may affect users' perception of the brand's professionalism and reliability. Moreover, there have been cases where users "tease" that they only remember Duo's funny stunts but have never actually studied on the app. How to balance the development of these two aspects is something that Duolingo needs to consider in the future.

As the competition among language learning apps becomes more intense, other competitors are constantly developing and improving their marketing strategies. Duolingo's success will attract many imitators and competitors, which is a double-edged sword for Duolingo. While other imitators are marketing, Duolingo will also achieve a certain marketing effect. However, if imitators or competitors gain some popularity by borrowing Duolingo's marketing methods and then improve and innovate on their own, Duolingo may be at risk of being replaced. Therefore, thinking about its own innovation points and ensuring its uniqueness are also aspects that Duolingo needs to focus more on in the future. Finally, Duolingo has a large number of users worldwide, but different cultures have different levels of acceptance and preferences. Whether it can balance the needs of different regions during marketing is also something that Duolingo should think about in the future.

In general, in the future, Duolingo's marketing methods face some limitations and challenges. It needs to think about both innovation and balance, make continuous adjustments and improvements, continue to develop its uniqueness, and balance the risky aspects to maintain its marketing effectiveness and market competitiveness.

4 ANALYSIS OF DUOLINGO'S BRAND SHAPING STRATEGY

Duolingo has stood out among numerous language learning apps with its unique brand shaping strategy, gaining user groups from various countries and earning an excellent reputation. The core of Duolingo's brand shaping lies in its uniqueness. Being free of charge, interesting, and efficient are all the unique features that Duolingo offers, which differentiate it from other apps. These three key points precisely target the users it aims to reach.

In today's globalized and multicultural market, the diversity of consumer demands highlights the increasingly enhanced social role of consumption (Tuli, Srivastava, & Kumar, 2025). In comparison with other apps or institutions that require a large amount of money and are dull and repetitive, Duolingo's free and interesting model is extremely attractive to its users, which also expands its user reach infinitely.

Being funny is also a great advantage of Duolingo. Duolingo has added game mechanisms to the dull and repetitive language learning process. There are rankings to stimulate users' fighting spirit, and experience points that can be exchanged for rewards. These mechanisms add a touch of fun to the boring learning process. All these unique features give Duolingo a stronger competitive edge in the market, creating a distinct contrast with other language learning apps and reaching a wider range of users from different industries and at various consumption levels.

Duolingo's marketing strategy has its own characteristics and can really strike a chord with users. In terms of social media marketing, Duolingo is actively involved in major domestic and international social platforms. It publishes relevant learning videos in the image of the green owl, reminding users of the content to be learned today, thus achieving the learning effect. The content published on social platforms is mostly presented from the perspective of the owl Duo. This perspective has a very unique effect, and while promoting the brand, it also perfects the lively image of the owl. The vivid image of the owl Duo has enhanced the brand's popularity and affinity.

Due to the advantages of being free and interesting that the Duolingo app itself possesses, Duolingo has a significant competitive edge over other apps. Duolingo also uses conventional marketing methods, such as offering rewards for inviting new users to register. This marketing approach

further expands Duolingo's influence and the scope of its user base.

At the same time, Duolingo attaches great importance to users' feedback on the app, which is also the soul of the Duolingo app. In terms of page design, the Duolingo app has a simple and easy-to-understand interface, which caters to both users with no language foundation and those with some language proficiency. Most importantly, the languages covered by Duolingo are rich and diverse, almost including all popular languages and involving many less common languages and even endangered languages, satisfying users' needs.

In recent years, Duolingo has integrated artificial intelligence (AI) with current hot topics. It uses AI to track users' learning progress and tailor learning methods for them. The most intuitive feature of Duolingo lies in its design. The app design uses bold green colors, and the image of the green owl is very vivid and cute. The other character images are also commendable. The "tough girl" character once sparked a heated discussion on the Internet, and both her character design and personality design are vivid. This unique visual style has formed the characteristic of Duolingo, which is also the reason why Duolingo stands out among many language learning apps.

Although Duolingo has achieved remarkable success in brand shaping, it also faces some challenges in the future. While Duolingo has caused a sensation on the Internet, many language learning apps have started to imitate it. In the face of numerous imitators, it remains to be seen whether Duolingo can still maintain its uniqueness in the future.

In addition, with the continuous increase in the number of users, their demands are also growing. During the process of developing its marketing strategies, Duolingo needs to focus on its product itself to maintain the essence of a learning app. Excessive entertainment marketing may affect the brand's reputation. The public may have doubts about whether an entertainment-oriented app can provide serious teaching. There may be an imbalance between entertainment and learning. These are all issues that Duolingo needs to consider in the future.

5 SUGGESTIONS

Duolingo's marketing approach is unique and meets the emotional value that the general public currently needs. However, it still needs to consider how to balance entertainment and learning. No matter how prosperous Duolingo's development is on the Internet, its essence remains a language learning app.

In the midst of various online trends and waves, Duolingo needs to think carefully about its future marketing strategies. For instance, it should consider whether it is necessary to participate in some unnecessary hot topics.

When it comes to the videos published on the Internet, while consolidating and developing the brand image of the green owl, it also needs to consider whether it is necessary to release too much content that is not related to learning. In the future development of the brand, the amount of content and the funny videos it creates should be moderately reduced, but it is not advisable to completely eliminate such videos. Losing the element of fun may cause Duolingo to lose its own characteristics and greatly reduce its brand effect. At the same time, more consideration should be given. After some funny videos bring short-term joy to users, do they play a role in strengthening the brand? If too many funny videos are released, users may think that the app is "not doing its job properly", which may greatly undermine users' trust in the nature of Duolingo as a learning app and give users the impression that it is not serious and overly entertaining. If this happens, Duolingo's brand image will be severely damaged.

Furthermore, Duolingo has users all over the world. Every entertainment-related move should take into account the taboos behind different cultures. If it accidentally violates these taboos, Duolingo will suffer the backlash of its entertainment-oriented approach, and the consequences will be difficult to reverse. In addition, Duolingo needs to consider its free service model. According to Duolingo's official account, although Duolingo stands out in the bustling Internet marketing, its financial situation is still not optimistic. It needs to further consider whether it should continue to maintain the feature of being free and whether sudden charging will cause user dissatisfaction.

6 CONCLUSION

Duolingo's marketing plan is a very successful one and is worthy of reference. Its page design is simple yet unique. In terms of online interaction, Duolingo has its own set of theories. It posts relevant hot topics on major social platforms in the guise of the green owl. While strengthening the image of the owl, it participates in these hot topics, increasing its exposure and expanding its user reach.

At the same time, the design of Duolingo's brand mascot has its own characteristics. The vivid portrayal of multiple characters has sharply increased

its online exposure, attracting a large number of users both at home and abroad, and significantly expanding its user base. The reasons why Duolingo has achieved such excellent results are that being free and interesting give it a strong competitive edge among learning apps.

However, at the same time, Duolingo needs to consider more carefully how to balance entertainment and learning, and whether it is worthwhile to implement the marketing strategies that trigger heated online discussions multiple times while maintaining its humorous approach. When releasing humorous marketing content in the future, more considerations should be given. The key is to combine learning with entertainment, as simply relying on humor for marketing may not yield good results or have much significance.

Behind the free service model, despite Duolingo's glorious image and the heated discussions it generates, its financial situation is weak, with even some losses. It needs to figure out how to balance being free and its financial status, and how to make users accept potential future fees without feeling averse. Maintaining its uniqueness, balancing entertainment, and upholding the essence of being a learning application are the keys to ensuring the long-term success of its marketing efforts.

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